Understanding Diabetes in the Classroom

With Canada having the sixth highest incidence of Type 1 diabetes occurring in children (www.averysangels.com), and with the rate of Type 1 diabetes estimated to increase 3% annually in children (www.jdrf.com), it is inevitable that you will eventually be faced head-on with this disease in the form of a student living with Type 1 diabetes, or T1D.

Tips for Teachers

1. **Know the warning signs:** There are very specific symptoms that a teacher should be aware of when a student has T1D in their classroom. By knowing what to look for, you can jump into action as soon as possible, and hopefully help to bring the student’s blood sugar to a safe level. These responses can be “increased thirst, increased urination, constant hunger, confusion, inattention, blurred vision, headache and fatigue” (Getch, Bhukhanwala & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2007).

2. **Be Aware of Behaviour:** Students with diabetes may also pose other challenges for the teacher in the form of behaviour issues. “Studies have indicated that children with diabetes may ... become belligerent and moody, have poor self-confidence and motivation from frequent absenteeism, and experience more anxiety and depression than their peers” (Getch, Bhukhanwala & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2007).

3. **Familiarize Yourself with the Individualized Healthcare Plan:** Each child with diabetes will have their own individualized healthcare plan outlining information like their health history, diagnosis, and assessment, to name a few. It should also provide information on “how to handle routine healthcare procedures, physical management techniques, and medical emergencies that may arise while the child is at school” (Getch, Bhukhanwala & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2007). It goes without saying that this information is invaluable for a teacher, since they are spending the majority of their day with the child and are ultimately responsible for their health and well-being. Knowing the steps that should be taken when a student is having a health issue will save time and anxiety for both parties.

Understanding the disease is the first step to accommodating a student with T1D. By educating yourself on the disease, you can continue to offer support and better understand your student and their needs.

Resources
