Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich
Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich

Student Services
Counselling and Coaching Centre

Information sheet, Diabetes

Tips for faculty members and advisors

Students with a disability or chronic illness have special needs which cannot always be recognised and interpreted at first sight. This information sheet is intended to provide you with specialist knowledge for open and sympathetic communication in your dealings with the students concerned, and to contribute towards understanding and improving the situation of students with impairments.

Diagnosis and functional description

Diabetes mellitus is a chronic metabolic disorder which is characterised by a high blood sugar level. This is caused by an absolute lack of insulin (type 1 Diabetes mellitus) or by diminished effect (relative lack) of insulin (type 2 Diabetes mellitus). Diabetes can also be caused by infections, medication, etc., or first occurs during pregnancy, and is then called gestational Diabetes.

Formerly, type 1 Diabetes was also called insulin-dependent Diabetes or juvenile Diabetes and is an autoimmune disorder. This occurs if the beta cells of the pancreas, which produce the insulin required to regulate the blood sugar, are destroyed by the body's immune system. Type 1 Diabetes occurs more frequently in children and young adults but can affect people of all ages.

The treatment of type 1 Diabetes consists in the replacement of the missing insulin. The required dosage depends on the current blood sugar level, the volume of absorbed carbohydrates and the planned physical activity.

Insulin must be administered in the form of injections since if it were administered orally (as a tablet), the insulin would be destroyed by the digestive enzymes. The development of modern injection aids (pen or pump) enables people with Diabetes to administer insulin in a simple, discreet and precisely dosed manner.

Effects in the academic environment and on academically relevant activities

- In cases of type 1 Diabetes, it is important that blood sugar values are checked regularly. For this reason, students affected have to have their measuring devices and insulin pens close to hand at all times, as well has having immediate access to rapidly effective carbohydrates. This also pertains to examination situations, in particular, since stress situations can cause the blood sugar level to fluctuate strongly.

- The more recent generation of blood sugar measuring devices are linked up to a smartphone app. Therefore, students must be able to take their smartphones in flight mode to lectures and examinations.

Effects on performance assessments

Students who are affected by Diabetes have the option of submitting an application for special arrangements with regard to **performance assessments** (information at www.ethz.ch/disability).

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the staff at the Counselling and Coaching Centre. Contact persons – student portal I ETH Zurich.