

3 Improving the care of people with diabetes and a learning disability

Annual Health Checks and diabetes screening

- Encourage people to have an Annual Health Check. Health checks are effective in identifying a wide range of previously unidentified conditions including diabetes. (1)
- The Royal College of General Practitioners provide a comprehensive step-by-step toolkit to carrying out an Annual Health Check for a person with a learning disability at <http://www.rcgp.org.uk/learningdisabilities>.

- For examples of Easy Read invitation letters and other Annual Health Check resources visit <http://www.yourhealthmatters-leeds.nhs.uk/get-checked-out-resources>.
- If a person does not qualify for an Annual Health Check they should be offered a chronic disease management and prevention check (or 40+ check where indicated).

<https://www.mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support/health/dont-miss-out>

<http://www.rcgp.org.uk/learningdisabilities/>

<http://www.yourhealthmatters-leeds.nhs.uk/get-checked-out>



Speak directly to the person with a learning disability



Tests

- Use Easy Read information which explains why any tests are being done, what the procedure is and what will happen afterwards. Use these materials to support a discussion.
- People with a learning disability must be included in decisions about their healthcare and give consent unless it is shown that they do not have mental capacity. See <https://www.mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support/mental-capacity-act>.
- Many people with a learning disability are fearful of needles. Talk to the person and their supporter about what adjustments can be made to ensure important tests can take place. Public Health England have published guidance on blood tests for people with a learning disability https://www.ndti.org.uk/uploads/files/Blood_tests_for_people_with_learning_disabilities.pdf.
- Make sure the outcomes of any tests are communicated to the person with a learning disability or their supporter to prevent anxiety.

Diagnosis

- The person is likely to need help to understand what diabetes is and why they have developed it. As you would with any patient, speak directly to the person rather than the caregiver or/supporter.
- Most people will need extra time talking with health professionals to help understanding of treatment.
- Make sure these material cover self-care, identifying hypoglycaemia and hyperglycaemia, managing medication and identifying side-effects of treatment.
- Research shows people with a learning disability will often need regular reinforcement of key information.
- There are Easy Read materials available to support these conversations. Visit www.diabetes.org.uk/learning-disability.



Diabetes UK
Easy Read
booklet



Mencap's
'Don't Miss Out'
Easy Read guide



Diabetes self-management

- Tailored education and guidance on self-management can support people to feel more confident in managing their diabetes. An Easy Read booklet about Type 2 diabetes, developed with Diabetes UK, is available on the web site www.diabetes.org.uk/learning-disability.
- The prescribed diabetes management plan should be included in the person's Health Check Action Plan if they have one. Diabetes nurse specialists can work with the person and their supporter using existing resources www.diabetes.org.uk/learning-disability.
- Check also if there are any diabetes education courses for people with a learning disability in your area.
- People with a learning disability are less likely to take up health screening invitations. Provide Easy Read invitations, for example, about retinal screening. Talk to the person and their supporters to see what adjustments might enable them to participate.

Weight management and healthy eating

- If a person has a high BMI ask them if they want help with healthy eating or losing weight. Most people will say yes.
- Easy Read information about weight management is available online. Make sure you have printed copies in your service. See www.diabetes.org.uk/learning-disability.
- Find out about weight management services suitable for people with a learning disability from your Local Authority. People with a learning disability may also benefit from mainstream weight management services.
- Commercial weight loss organisations such as Slimming World and Weight Watchers support the attendance of people with a learning disability, and carers may be able to attend sessions for free. Some CCGs provide attendance at commercial weight loss organisations on prescription.
- Explore any barriers such as transport, cost, supporter time and readiness of service to make adjustments before making any referrals.

Things you can do now

- 1) Establish who will conduct Annual Health Check/chronic disease management reviews. Make sure they have access to our resources.
- 2) Create a library of Easy Read resources relevant to diabetes and weight management.
- 3) Find out who provides weight loss services, exercise groups and diabetes courses appropriate for people with a learning disability in your area. Make a note on the referral about the person's additional support needs.