

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF TRANSITIONING TO UNIVERSITY WITH TYPE 1 DIABETES

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INTRODUCTION

UK students with Type 1 Diabetes Mellitus (T1DM) often experience poorer health outcomes after moving away for university. While Canadian research highlights systemic barriers during this transition, such as reduced support from healthcare services and universities, no qualitative studies have explored whether UK students face similar challenges. This study addresses this gap by examining the lived experiences of UK students with T1DM within the context of the NHS and UK higher education.

AIMS

1. To explore the lived experiences of UK students with T1DM during the transition to university.
2. To identify the types of support students feel they need during this transition.

METHODOLOGY

- 7 current/former undergraduate students with T1DM were recruited from 4 UK universities via participant pools and social media.
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted over Zoom.
- Explored experiences of: healthcare, lifestyle, support & diabetes management during university transition.
- Interviews were transcribed and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis.

RESULTS

Three superordinate themes were developed: Management, Lifestyle and Support.



CONCLUSION

This study examines the challenges faced by UK university students with Type 1 Diabetes Mellitus (T1DM) during their transition, including decreased support and lifestyle changes affecting diabetes management. Suggested solutions include:

- TYA services to establish peer support groups for self-management.
- Psychologists to collaborate with university staff for better health support.
- Healthcare teams to offer workshops on lifestyle planning and remote consultations for accessibility.

Further research is required to assess the effectiveness of these strategies.



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MANAGEMENT THEMES

Sub-optimal

“Monitoring is the hardest part for me at uni. When I’m out I forget to check around mealtimes.” (Mary)

Routine

“I always was home for mealtimes; I wouldn’t be eating out. It was easy to do my injections then [...] But at university, it’s not the same.” (Mary)

Diet

“At uni, you go out, you might get a few drinks, a greasy kebab on the way home. It’s hard to stay on top of it.” (Jon)

Healthcare

“The children’s clinic is a lot more supportive than the adult clinic. They do have a number I could text, but they don’t text us.” (Sadie)

Needs

“I think it would be reassuring for me and everyone else if there were a team within the university who were knowledgeable.” (Connor)

Independence

“If I was having a hypo, I’d text my Mum for an apple juice, but I didn’t have that support at university” (Rucha)

Alcohol

“No one teaches you about drinking; it was complete trial and error for me, and a couple of times, it ended badly - I was hypo” (Sadie)

LIFESTYLE THEMES

Institutional

“In school, there was a medical room for managing my diabetes. At uni, there isn’t anything like that, so I just have to figure it out myself.” (Vanessa)

SUPPORT THEMES

Support Network

“It’s weird living with someone who doesn’t know my diabetes inside and out, like my Mum does. When you move out, it’s completely on you.” (Elsa)

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