

People living with diabetes should feel empowered to pursue their athletic and physical activity goals free from discrimination and preconceived judgments on how their diabetes may impact their abilities. From high school and youth athletics, college sports, to the Olympics, many athletes demonstrate that people living with diabetes can be successful in their chosen sport or recreational activity.

Examples include accomplished athletes such as

Adam Morrison - *basketball*
Marc Andrews - *football*
Charlotte Drury - *gymnastics*
Michelle McGann - *golf*
Gary Hall - *swimming*
Sam Fuld - *baseball*
and more.



With support and education from an athlete's health care team, sports participation and other physical activity is rewarding and provides valuable health benefits. People living with diabetes can safely perform in sports at all levels while managing their diabetes in accordance with their health care team's recommendations. Despite this, athletes with diabetes continue to experience discrimination in sports settings, often stemming from stigma and conscious and unconscious bias.

For example, they may experience:

- Being excluded from competitions or tryouts due to misconceptions about their health or abilities
- Being discouraged from participating in certain sports because of safety concerns that are not evidence-based
- Unnecessarily, prohibiting or restricting the use of necessary medical devices, such as insulin pumps or continuous glucose monitors (CGMs)
- Facing penalties or disciplinary action for taking short breaks for tasks to manage diabetes, such as, checking blood glucose (blood sugar) levels, administering insulin, or treating low blood glucose (hypoglycemia)
- Coaches or staff questioning their toughness, commitment, or reliability
- Coaches or teammates making insensitive comments or jokes about their condition

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Legal Protections

Sports teams or associations may be subject to antidiscrimination laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act and/or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and comparable state laws. These laws generally prohibit discrimination against individuals with disabilities, including diabetes, and require covered entities, such as schools, sports leagues, franchises, athletic associations, youth sports programs and more, to provide reasonable accommodations or modifications to facilitate equal opportunity. Reasonable accommodations for an athlete with diabetes may include providing extra time to monitor blood glucose, being permitted to administer insulin or other medication, storing fast-acting carbohydrates on the sidelines in an accessible location, and having a safe, cool space to store insulin.

- **Athletic associations and sports teams:** Athletic associations generally have legal obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act and are required to make reasonable accommodations or modifications to policies and procedures to prevent discrimination on the basis of disability. While organizations are not required to make modifications that would “fundamentally alter the nature of the services,” most modifications for people with diabetes do not alter the nature of the game or incur additional costs. Allowing an athlete to wear their medical devices (like an insulin pump or CGM), administer insulin, treat hypoglycemia, and access diabetes supplies are easily implemented without impacting the competition or sports event.

Did you know...

...the law also protects professional athletes? In the case of *PGA Tour v. Martin*, the Supreme Court ruled that allowing Martin, a professional golfer with a mobility disability, to use a golf cart as a reasonable modification was not a fundamental alteration of the game. The case showed that professional sports programs and associations also have obligations to accommodate individuals with disabilities and avoid discrimination!

- **Extracurriculars and sports in K–12:** Sports or extracurriculars at public schools or schools (including private schools) that receive federal funding have additional legal obligations for children with disabilities under the following laws:
 - Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act applies to interscholastic and intramural athletics at schools or programs that receive federal funding and prohibits discrimination of people with diabetes.
 - [The Americans with Disabilities Act](#) is a federal law with similar provisions to Section 504. It applies to public and private schools, preschools, childcare centers, and camps, except those run by religious institutions.
 - The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides federal funds to state and local education agencies to provide special education services to some children with certain disabilities. In order to get services, the student's disability must harm their ability to learn.

Schools must provide equal opportunity to athletic programs, which may include an obligation to provide diabetes care and assistance. Students with diabetes are encouraged to [develop a Section 504 plan](#), an Individualized Education Program (IEP), or other written plan that outlines the accommodations each student requires for school sport participation and sports-related field trips. For more information about the rights of children with diabetes in school and extracurricular activities, visit diabetes.org/SafeAtSchool.

Requesting Accommodations in Sports and Extracurriculars

- **Start by talking to your coach, athletic director, or athletic trainer** about your diabetes management needs and what you need to participate and stay healthy.
- **Document your requests.** Putting your requests in writing is best practice to document your communications and to ensure that everyone is on the same page.
- **Look into your sports association's, college's, or school's specific rules related to athletics participation.** The process of requesting a reasonable accommodation or modification to a rule or policy may depend on whether there is a relevant rule or policy. For example, your college's disability services office may have a specific process to request accommodations, or sports leagues or associations may have their own procedures for evaluating disability accommodation requests.

Practical Tips for Success

1. Inform your coach, athletic trainer, or other responsible individuals about your diabetes management needs. It is important that someone knows you have diabetes, what the symptoms of high and low blood glucose are, and any other diabetes management needs so they can support you and help you in the event of an emergency.
2. Talk with your health care team about diabetes management strategies. Sports participation may require alternative strategies pursuant to your doctor's recommendations. For example, water-based sports may require a plan for what to do with diabetes technology, outdoor activities may require plans for hot weather, or athletes may have specific nutrition needs.
3. Stay fueled and hydrated. All athletes should maintain a proper diet and hydration. This can be especially important for people with diabetes! Keep snacks, water, and fast-acting carbohydrates on hand during training and competitions.
4. Find your support system. Whether they are your coach, teammates, friends, or family, find people to celebrate your athletic successes with and who can help support your goals!

We are Here to Help

The American Diabetes Association® (ADA) advocates for the rights of people with diabetes. For more information, call **1-800-DIABETES (800-342-2383)** or email **AskAda@diabetes.org**. If your issue is within our areas of service, you will receive tailored information and guidance. Although the ADA cannot represent you or advocate on your behalf, we can help you understand your rights and give you practical tools to solve your problem. We may also be able to refer you to an attorney.

Additional Resources

- Webpage: [Exercise and wellness](#)
- Video: [Supporting Athletes with Diabetes for Coaches and Athletic Trainers](#)
- Blog: [Diabetes Day by Day](#)—read the stories of athletes thriving with diabetes:
 - [Meet Kaila](#)
 - [Meet Margaret](#)
 - [Meet Emmanuel](#)