

Tools You Can Use



What you need to know about standardized testing and diabetes

For most kids applying to college, the standardized test is a key (if much loathed) part of the process. While there are some schools that no longer require the SAT or ACT, most still do, which means at least one day of anguished No. 2-pencil sharpening and answer-bubble filling. If you are a high schooler with diabetes (or the parent of one) you may need to request special accommodations during testing sessions. For example, it will be important to bring in a blood glucose meter, have access to snacks to treat hypoglycemia, and be able to take an extended break, if necessary, to take care of diabetes needs. Since these types of things are not usually permitted, you need to make a formal request to one of the agencies that administers the tests. Here are some tips for making the process run smoothly:

By Crystal Jackson
and Katharine Gordon

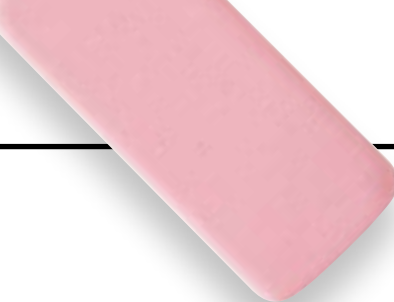
▣ **A** ▣ **Don't hesitate to ask for what you need.**

Colleges reviewing your test scores have no way of knowing if you took your test using special accommodations, so asking for the assistance can only work in your favor.

▣ **B** ▣ **Provide documentation.** Getting accommodations may be easier if you already have an Individualized Education Program (IEP), Section 504 Plan, or other formal written plan at your high school. Don't have one? You can still request accommodations from the testing agencies, you'll just have to provide the right documentation (and even if you have a plan in place, you may still need additional paperwork). At a minimum, you should be prepared to supply a letter from your doctor confirming your diagnosis and detailing specific accommodations needed. For example, students with stable blood glucose levels may only need extended breaks between sections of tests, while students experiencing swings in blood glucose levels may need permission to take breaks as necessary.

For the ACT, accommodations are organized into three categories: Center Testing No. 1, Center Testing No. 2, and Special Testing. Most students with diabetes fall under Center Testing No. 1 and will need to submit documentation from their doctor. (Some students who need additional accommodations may fall into another category; visit the ACT Services for Students with Disabilities Web site for more information.) Students taking International Baccalaureate exams should contact their high school's IB coordinator for more information. For College Board tests (including the SAT), the College Board's Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office requires each school to designate an SSD coordinator, who you should contact to begin the process.

▣ **C** ▣ **Plan ahead.** Because the process of obtaining accommodations can take several months, it is essential to begin early. Students who plan to take



the PSAT should contact their SSD coordinator the semester before the test. For the Advanced Placement exams, let your coordinator know as soon as you sign up. You'll need to register separately with each testing agency you plan to use.

□ **D** □ **Know what to ask for.** The agencies have strict policies that prevent students from taking additional or extended breaks or bringing snacks, drinks, and electronic devices into testing areas unless they have advance permission. Therefore, remember that you have to specifically request any necessary diabetes supplies and equipment, snacks, bathroom breaks, and extended breaks. You may be placed in a separate room or testing location with a separate proctor. And don't be surprised if the accommodations you are granted differ from those you receive at your high school. Testing agencies conduct their own review of your situation. For example, even if you are given extra time on your tests in high school, for the standardized tests you may only be allowed extended breaks between sections.

□ **E** □ **Consider your options for rescheduling.** It's a big decision to make, but rescheduling may be the right choice if your blood glucose is way out of range on test day. The SAT and ACT, which are administered several times a year, have policies that

permit students to cancel their scores in the case of a medical situation—a hypoglycemic event, for example—that occurs during the test. Depending on the test and circumstances, you may have to pay an additional fee to reschedule. If you are unable to take the PSAT, you should document your blood glucose and all other symptoms and contact the National Merit Scholarship Corporation for information on rescheduling as soon as possible so that you can still compete for a scholarship. If you feel that you will not be able to complete AP exams or IB assessments, do not begin them; document your blood glucose and all other symptoms, and immediately contact your SSD coordinator or IB coordinator to speak about rescheduling options.

□ **F** □ **All of the above.** Yes, this sounds like a lot to deal with—on top of the actual tests themselves, and not to mention the rest of the college application process. But knowing your rights as a student with disabilities means that you get a chance to exercise them, and a fair shot at doing your best when it matters most. ▲

Crystal Jackson is an associate director at the American Diabetes Association and leads its Safe at School Campaign. Katharine Gordon is the 2008–2010 ADA Novo-Nordisk Legal Advocacy Fellow.



Getting in Touch

ACT **ACT Services for Students with Disabilities:** (319) 337-1000; act.org/aap/disab/index.html

SAT **College Board Services for Students with Disabilities:** (609) 771-7137; collegeboard.com/ssd/student/index.html

IB **International Baccalaureate:** (212) 696-4464; ibo.org/programmes/pd/special/

If you experience discrimination in standardized testing, call 1-800-DIABETES (1-800-342-2383) for additional information and to speak with a legal advocate.



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