



# Management of Diabetes Mellitus in police custody

Dec 2024 Review date Dec 2027- check [www.fflm.ac.uk](http://www.fflm.ac.uk) for latest update

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## Introduction

This guidance is to assist the management of diabetics for Forensic clinicians working in the custodial environment. It is concerned with the care of the detainee with Type 1 diabetes or Type 2 diabetes.

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of Type 2 diabetics who require insulin. There has also been an increase in the number of Type 1 diabetics who are obese and insulin resistant, who now use oral medications, (similar to those given to Type 2 diabetics), in addition to insulin.

All Forensic clinicians should have the means to test blood glucose (BG) with a quantitative meter which is regularly checked against a reference sample.

Some meters also indicate if ketones are present. Colour strip visual assessment of ketones on urinalysis can also inform clinical decision making. Ketone strips tend to have a short life and it is essential to ensure they are 'in date' or are replaced. It is important to highlight the significance of ketones as this may indicate acidosis which is a medical emergency. Be guided by the type of diabetes, drug history, symptoms and signs and specific blood sugar and ketone measurements.

Measurement of the BG to obtain a baseline estimation is recommended as soon as possible for all diabetic detainees. This may be done by the patient. Results should be shared with other relevant healthcare staff to assist the provision of ongoing care.

It is not unknown for a detainee to claim to be diabetic; even having insulin in their possession which is not prescribed for them. Insulin pens are usually carried without a pharmacy label, so a blood glucose level  $> 13$  mmol/l is very helpful in identifying diabetes, unless corroboration is obtained from other sources: e.g. the electronic care summary, by detailed questioning of the detainee on diabetes with appropriate responses, or the testimony of a close relative.

Forensic clinicians need to instruct custody staff that if a known diabetic detainee's condition deteriorates, it is safer to assume this is due to hypoglycaemia and to administer glucose. This may prove lifesaving and would not significantly affect hyperglycaemia. Even if the detainee's recovery is complete, the Forensic clinician must be informed, as changes in medication may be indicated.

It is worth remembering that, unless extreme, hyperglycaemic risks tend to manifest over years rather than hours therefore in the acute phase a low grade hyperglycaemia carries less risk than hypoglycaemia,

Forensic clinicians should reassure themselves that custody staff are aware of the clinical features of hypoglycaemia which may include:

- feeling weak and dizzy
- feeling hungry
- a higher heart rate than usual
- blurred vision
- pallor
- temporary loss of consciousness
- confusion
- convulsions

Hypoglycaemia may also occur as a complication of heavy alcohol use and stimulant ingestion.

Risks of complication are increased in those with poor disease control, a frequent situation for those detained in custody.

Co-morbidity with substance misuse, especially alcohol, is common, and mental illness, in particular depression, has a higher incidence in diabetic patients; these should be fully considered in advice for care during detention and interview.

A finger prick blood sample may be taken to clarify the diagnosis of hypoglycaemia. Levels below 4 mmol/l are diagnostic, but if this causes any difficulty, it is safer to treat immediately. This includes calling emergency assistance in the absence of the FP/HCP on site.

## History

The following information should always be obtained as a baseline by the clinician:

- determine history (Type 1 or Type 2);
- medications (relevant to diabetes and other conditions);
- doses of medication, time taken and when next due;
- level of diabetic control i.e. recent BG levels, including hospital admissions and episodes of hypoglycaemia;
- other medical conditions associated with diabetes e.g. hypertension, cardiovascular disease, visual impairment, renal, neurological, depression or dermatological complications;
- dietary requirements: when and what the detainee last ate;
- note recent exercise;
- note any previous episodes of hypoglycaemia, documenting any neuroglycopenic symptoms including aggression, confusion, personality or behaviour changes, associated with this; such records might be relevant in a potential claim of automatism as a defence.

Forensic clinicians should be familiar with the [DVLA guidance](#) on diabetes.



## Examination

In addition to blood glucose measurement consideration should be given to recording:

- oxygen saturation
- pulse
- blood pressure
- temperature, if indicated
- condition of skin surfaces
- appropriate examination of body systems
- mental state if appropriate

## Investigations

Forensic clinicians should perform an estimation of BG level with a blood glucose meter. The detainee should wash their hands with soap and water and dry them carefully, or a non-alcohol swab can be used for cleaning the skin. If the detainee has their own device, witnessed self-testing may be conducted. The baseline level will inform the need for and frequency of further testing.

Some patients may have a continuous glucose monitor linked to their phone for continuous blood glucose measurements. These devices can be temperamental and are changed at allocated times. It would be advisable in a custody setting to obtain a BG baseline with a blood glucose meter.

Ideally, the insulin dependent diabetic should follow their usual pattern and doses of insulin administration and dietary intake. However, the food available in the custody environment may have a different carbohydrate load to that which the detainee usually takes. Therefore, the detainee's meal-related insulin dose may need to be reduced.

It may be advisable in insulin-dependent diabetics to check the blood glucose levels more frequently during detention than they would usually do. Urinalysis may assist in the diagnosis of ketoacidosis, in the absence of ketone blood testing strips and thereby aid decision making regarding fitness for detention.

## Management Plan

A careful management plan should be detailed and shared with the detainee, the forensic clinician and custody staff, ensuring appropriate hand-over at shift change. Particular care should be taken in those with complications such as drug intoxication, alcohol dependence or acute intoxication, head injuries and concurrent infections or complications, e.g. vomiting. Consideration should be given to the recommended frequency of BG testing and when the detainee should be reviewed by the FP/HCP.

## Hyperglycaemia

If blood glucose (BG) is  $> 25$  mmol/l **and** there is evidence of impairment of the level of consciousness, or confusion or concurrent infection, the detainee should be referred to hospital immediately. Safe practice would mean that the Forensic clinician should consider hospital transfer for those detainees with a BG  $> 30$  mmol/l.

Detainees with BG levels between 12-25 mmol/l would normally be Fit to be Detained (FTBD), but an individual global assessment (including assessing for the presence of ketones) must be undertaken.

It may be safer practice to maintain BG levels slightly higher than optimal community levels to reduce vulnerability to hypoglycaemia during detention.

## Diabetic Ketoacidosis (DKA)

This may occur with hyperglycaemia, but it is also a risk at near normal levels of blood sugar in Type 2 diabetics treated with an SGLT -2 inhibitor e.g. empagliflozin.

Typical symptoms of diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA) include:

- thirst
- polyuria
- nausea
- vomiting
- abdominal pain
- dehydration
- shallow rapid breathing
- confusion and sometimes even coma.

Non ketotic osmolar or hyperosmolar state should also be considered.

Symptoms of DKA usually evolve over a 24 hour period, with the first sign often being hyperglycaemia.

These symptoms of DKA with urine ketones of greater than 2 or capillary blood ketones more than 3.0 mmol/L are an indication to refer to & admit to hospital, as an emergency.

## Hypoglycaemia

If the Forensic clinician measures the BG between 2-4 mmol/l, they should administer 10g glucose as drink/gel/tablet or carbohydrate foodstuff and review over the next 10 minutes when the BG level should be repeated.

The Forensic clinician should remain with the detainee during this time. 10g of glucose is available from 2 teaspoons sugar, 3 sugar lumps or 1 tube glucose gel. For those able to swallow, after this initial sugar 'boost', the detainee should follow up with starchy carbohydrate containing food, when they have recovered sufficiently.

First line treatment for those unable to swallow or unconscious is 500 micrograms of glucagon IM, with IV glucose 20% as a second line if glucagon is not available. (It should be remembered that glucagon requires the liver to have stores of glycogen and so in alcoholic, or other liver diseases, it may not work.) Glucagon also works poorly in children and teenagers. Glucagon often causes severe nausea and vomiting. In most situations where glucagon is used in management, the Forensic clinician will also need to request referral to & ongoing treatment in hospital.

The Forensic clinician should remain with the detainee until they are conscious. The detainee may need to be transferred to hospital especially if their management has included recent use of a long-acting insulin, a long acting sulphonylurea, drugs or alcohol.



## Medication and diet

The Forensic clinician should recommend that all insulin injections or oral diabetic medications are brought in from home, if not with the detainee already/when arrested. The Forensic clinician may choose to supervise, or instruct an HCP colleague to supervise, the detainee's self-administration of insulin. See Faculty Guidance on [Safe and Secure Administration of Medication in Police Custody](#).

In the event that the usual insulin is not available, (not with the detainee, or not available as stock medication in custody), the Forensic clinician is recommended to obtain a suitable prescription (providers should have appropriate arrangements in place to organise necessary private prescriptions). It is prudent to organise regular reviews and BG testing if there has been a change to the normal therapy regime.

Advice may be taken from the duty Medical Registrar at the local hospital.

It may be advisable, especially in detainees where the Forensic clinician perceives a risk e.g. attempts to seek diversion, to encourage diabetics to first eat adequate quantities of carbohydrate and then to administer their insulin to prevent episodes of hypoglycaemia.

Hypoglycaemia may sometimes occur in patients treated who are taking oral hypoglycaemic medication, particularly the sulphonylureas, e.g. gliclazide. The Forensic clinicians must ensure adequate handover of BG levels and current management plan to the Forensic clinician covering the next shift, with responsibility for the detainee to facilitate ongoing care.

Custody staff should inform the Forensic clinician of any refusal by the detainee to take main meals and/or medication; the Forensic clinician should then review the management plan, or re-assess the detainee, as appropriate.

## Use of insulin pump therapy in custody

'Insulin Pump Therapy' also known as Continuous Subcutaneous Insulin Infusion (CSII) is used in the treatment of Type 1 diabetes. Insulin is continuously infused into the subcutaneous tissue by a thin plastic tube usually connected to a soft plastic cannula inserted under the skin. Pumps are about the size of an average mobile phone and run on batteries, with safety features to warn the user if the power is running low or if the pump is running out of insulin.

If a person using insulin pump therapy has been arrested, the custody officer should call the forensic clinician to assess the detainee. The level of supervision required, whilst awaiting the clinical assessment, will be dependent on an overall risk assessment by the custody officer, but the detainee may well need to be on constant supervision.

Insulin pumps are used by diabetics to help manage their diabetes particularly in those who require multiple daily insulin injections. Before each meal, a bolus dose is taken, based on the amount of carbohydrate to be eaten. In between these a basal rate is set. The forensic clinician should advise on the frequency of medical review and BG monitoring.

The forensic clinician should check whether there is any possibility that the device has been dislodged during arrest and also assess the risk of self-harm (either by overdose of insulin or use of the tubing as a potential ligature). With

Bluetooth connection devices, it may be possible to keep the meter outside the cell.

If there is any suspicion that any substance, e.g. Illicit drugs, other than the required insulin dose has been injected via the device the detainee should be transferred immediately to the ED. The same approach is required if there is a possibility of insulin overdose [see management of unconscious hypoglycaemia].

## Liaisons with other community clinical staff

If during detention the forensic clinician becomes aware of complicating factors or emergency scenarios, e.g. hypoglycaemia, it would be best practice to share this information with the detainee's GP and specialist team, with their consent.

## Summary flow chart

A summary flow chart follows on the next page to facilitate easy reference for the forensic clinician on management of diabetes in relation to the BG levels during detention in custody. This is particularly with reference to fitness to be detained in custody and fitness to be interviewed.

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**History**

- Type I or Type 2
- Medication relevant to DM and other conditions
- Medication known to precipitate diabetes e.g. antipsychotic drugs
- Control including hospital admissions and episodes of hypoglycaemia
- Associated medical conditions: hypertension; CHD; alcohol dependence; pancreatitis
- Vulnerabilities: visual; renal; neuropathies; depression
- Dietary requirements

**Examination**

- Pulse; BP; temperature if indicated
- Pulse oximetry
- Condition of skin surfaces
- Appropriate examination of body systems to reveal complications or infection
- Mental state and consideration of effects of hypo or hyperglycaemia on fitness for interview

**Investigations**

- Blood glucose (BG) level and capillary blood ketones
- Urinalysis may be indicated for ketones, protein, blood and nitrites

