

Patient Handout

Staying Healthy to Avoid Illness

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When you have diabetes, managing your blood glucose and taking care of your health may help you avoid serious illness and a trip to the hospital. Staying as healthy as you can requires regular planning and maintenance.

STAY AS HEALTHY AS YOU CAN

Manage Your Blood Glucose Level

- Monitor your blood glucose level *daily* to help stay at goal and keep you aware of changes.
- Take your medications as directed to keep your blood glucose level at goal.

Take Care of Your Health

- Get an annual flu vaccine.
- Ask your doctor about a pneumonia vaccine or other vaccines you may need.
- Practice good skin care and foot care by rubbing lotion on dry skin, checking for redness or irritated areas, and looking at your feet daily.
- Maintain good preventive care. For example, be sure to see your primary care doctor, dentist, foot doctor (podiatrist), and eye doctor (ophthalmologist) regularly.
- *Seek medical attention immediately if you develop a fever, nausea and vomiting, persistent or productive cough, shortness of breath or chest pain, or have a change in blood glucose patterns.*

Supplies You Need at Home

- A blood glucose meter and enough strips and lancets to last at least a few days.
- Test strips for urine ketones, if you have type 1 diabetes.
- More than 1 week's supply of your oral medications.
- Enough insulin and syringes or pens, if you take insulin, to last at least 1 week.
- In case your insulin pump doesn't work, a backup vial of insulin and syringes to cover your dosages for at least a few days.
- An oral thermometer.
- An over-the-counter analgesic in case you need something for pain or fever. Ask your doctor which one is best for you.

What to Do When You Aren't Feeling Well

- Before you even become ill, create a plan with your health care provider about what you should do if you aren't feeling well.
- If illness or infection occurs, you will need to check your blood glucose level more often than usual, maybe even every 2 to 4 hours.
- Because you may eat less when you're not feeling well, you may think you need less diabetes medication or insulin. But illness may actually raise your blood glucose level and increase your need for medication. You may need to check with your health care provider about increasing your oral medication or insulin doses when you're not feeling well.
- Be sure to drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated.
- If you have type 1 diabetes and your blood glucose level is higher than 250 mg/dL, you need to check the ketone level in your urine. If the test strip shows that ketones are present, you need to call your health care provider right away. This may be a sign that you are developing *diabetic ketoacidosis*—a potentially life-threatening condition.

Complications From Too Much Blood Glucose

- Too much blood glucose is called *hyperglycemia*.
- Symptoms of hyperglycemia may include increased thirst, increased hunger, increased urination, fatigue, and blurred vision. Weight loss may also occur.
- There are 2 conditions that can develop when you have hyperglycemia for a long time: *diabetic ketoacidosis* and *hyperosmolar hyperglycemic state*.
- Having an infection or illness makes you more likely to develop these conditions.
- *Diabetic ketoacidosis* is more common in people with *type 1 diabetes*. This condition occurs because their bodies do not make enough insulin.

- *Hyperosmolar hyperglycemic* state is more common in people with *type 2 diabetes*, especially older patients. This is more likely to occur with illness or infection. This condition occurs because they need more insulin or oral medication. Not receiving an adequate dose causes a rise in blood glucose and dehydration.
- If you begin to have any of the symptoms listed below, follow the plan you've created with your health care provider, or contact him or her right away.

Diabetic Ketoacidosis in Type 1 Diabetes

Signs and symptoms

- Elevated blood glucose level (>300 mg/dL)
- Nausea and vomiting
- Urine ketones
- Abdominal pain
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Decreased concentration, drowsiness, and fainting or loss of consciousness

Hyperosmolar Hyperglycemic State in Type 2 Diabetes

Signs and symptoms

- Elevated blood glucose level (can be very high, even >600 mg/dL)
- Signs are similar to diabetic ketoacidosis
- Nausea and vomiting may not be present
- Fatigue and confusion may be present

IN CASE YOU MUST GO TO THE HOSPITAL

There are also actions you can take now to be prepared if you require hospitalization.

Be Prepared Before You Go

- It is important to have certain information with you when you go to the hospital. Be sure to gather this information now, and let someone you trust know where it is.
- Be sure to have the following information ready:
 - A list of all your health care providers, with their telephone numbers.
 - A list of all your medications, with the dosages. Also include any over-the-counter medications and supplements you may be taking.
 - A list of any allergies you have to medications and foods.
 - A list of any medical conditions you have.
- In case of emergency: The hospital will also need the name and telephone number of someone who can be contacted. This could be your spouse, a relative, or a close friend.
- Permission to discuss your condition: You also may want to give the hospital permission to discuss your medical condition and the details of your care with your spouse, a relative, or a close friend. Your doctors will not discuss your condition with anyone unless you give them permission.

Heading Back Home

- When you are ready to come home, let your doctor know if you are concerned about taking care of yourself.
- For example, you may be concerned about monitoring your blood glucose level, taking the right amount of medication, giving yourself an injection, or preparing your meals. You also may be concerned about moving around the house, getting dressed, or bathing.
- Your doctor may be able to provide a referral for a social worker or for home health care. Being able to talk to someone, or get assistance with nursing care or therapy, can help you return safely to your home. It may also improve your recovery.

When you have diabetes, staying healthy and avoiding problems takes some regular planning and maintenance. Seeking early attention can help you avoid serious problems.