Living Well with Diabetes

What you need to know about blood sugar

Everyone has some sugar in his or her blood because the body needs sugar for energy. But too much sugar in the blood can cause health problems. People with diabetes have blood sugar (also called blood glucose) that’s too high.

How do you get high blood sugar?

Your body gets sugar from the food you eat. It’s also made in your liver. Your body needs a hormone, called insulin, to help you use the sugar in your blood for energy.

When you have diabetes, your body has either quit making insulin, isn’t making enough insulin, or the insulin your body is making doesn’t work the way it should. Without insulin, your body can’t use the sugar in your blood for energy. The sugar stays in your blood and causes high blood sugar.

Why should I be worried about high blood sugar?

When your blood sugar is high for a long time, it causes problems with your heart, eyes, kidneys, and nerves. If you keep your blood sugar as close to normal as possible, you can lower your chances of getting serious health problems.

What should my blood sugar levels be?

The American Diabetes Association recommends aiming for the following blood sugar levels:

- When you wake up in the morning: Blood sugar should be between 80 and 130.
- Two hours after you started your last meal: Blood sugar should be less than 180.

These numbers might need to be different for you. Your doctor or diabetes nurse can help you decide what levels are best for you.

How can I control my blood sugar?

Your doctor or diabetes nurse will work with you on a treatment plan. Your treatment plan includes 4 things you can do every day to help keep your blood sugar from getting too high:

- Follow your meal plan.
- Be physically active.
- Take your diabetes medicine.
- Check your blood sugar.
Follow your meal plan
Your diabetes nurse can help you with a food plan that’s right for you, or ask your doctor for a referral to see a registered dietitian.

Your meal plan will include:

- Meals and snacks designed to help you get the right balance of proteins, fats, and carbohydrates.
- Keeping track of carbohydrates. Our bodies need carbohydrates for energy. But eating too much at one time can raise blood sugar quickly.

Be physically active
When you’re physically active, your body uses the sugar in your blood for energy. This helps you keep your blood sugar closer to normal. If you aren’t already physically active:

- Start slowly. Begin with 10-15 minutes of physical activity every other day.
- Increase your goal when you’re ready. Aim for at least 30 minutes most days of the week.

Take your diabetes medicine
Your diabetes medicine, whether you’re taking pills or insulin, works together with your meal and exercise plan to help lower your blood sugar.

- Take your medicine everyday.
- Use a diary or calendar to help you keep track of when to take your medicine, and how much to take.

Check your blood sugar
Checking your blood sugar helps you find out if your treatment plan is working or if you need to make changes.

- In general, most people find it helpful to check their blood sugar when they first wake up in the morning and again before their evening meal or going to bed. Others test before or after each meal.
- Your doctor or nurse will help you find a schedule that’s best for you.

My blood sugar level targets:

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