

Living Well with Diabetes

Type 1 Diabetes: Taking care of yourself when you're sick

Being sick can make your blood sugar levels harder to control. This is true whether you're sick with the flu, sick to your stomach, fighting any other kind of illness or infection, or you just have a head cold. Here are some important steps to take to keep your blood sugar under control and help you get well sooner.

Take your diabetes medicine

Don't stop taking your insulin if you're sick and can't eat. Ask your doctor about how to adjust your insulin when you're sick. You might need to take more because being sick can raise your blood sugar more than usual. Don't change your dose before talking to your doctor.

Check your blood sugar and ketone levels

Check your blood sugar every 2 to 4 hours to make sure it stays as close to normal as possible. If your blood sugar is over 240 mg/dl, check your urine for ketones. If your blood sugar is over 240 mg/dl at 2 different tests taken 2 to 3 hours apart and your test shows moderate or heavy ketones both of those times, call your doctor.

Even if you don't have ketones in your urine, you should call your doctor if your blood sugar stays above 240 mg/dl for several readings over a few hours, especially if you're throwing up or have diarrhea.

Drink plenty of liquids

Try to drink between 1 and 2 cups of water every hour to keep from getting dehydrated. Besides water, other good choices are calorie-free and caffeine-free teas and soft drinks. If you've been vomiting, take small sips to help you keep from throwing up.

Keep your body fueled

Even if you don't feel hungry, you still need food for energy. Try to get about 150 grams of carbohydrate each day, or about 50 grams every 3 to 4 hours.

Follow your normal meal plan as closely as possible. If you have trouble eating or swallowing solid food, try soft foods or liquids to replace the carbohydrates you usually eat.

If you have diarrhea, or are throwing up, try drinking clear liquids or frozen solids, such as fruit juice, broth, or popsicles, for the first 24 hours. After that, try adding other liquids (not clear) and soft foods, such as yogurt or applesauce, that are easier to digest.

Watch out for over-the-counter medicines

If you want to take any over-the-counter cold or flu medicines, be sure to ask your pharmacist or doctor which ones are safe for you. And be careful about using more than one product. Many cold and flu medicines have added sugars. They can also interact with one another, and with other medicine you're taking.

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Plan ahead

Don't wait until you're sick to get the test supplies you'll need. You can get sick day supplies for a small cost from your Kaiser Permanente pharmacy and make a kit to have on hand. Be sure to check expiration dates and replace as needed. Ask your pharmacist for any of the following supplies, if you don't already have them on hand:

- ☐ Glucose tablets in case you get low blood sugar and can't eat
- ☐ Thermometer to check your temperature
- ☐ Keto-stix, to check your urine for ketones
- ☐ Glucose meter to check blood sugar levels
- ☐ Test strips for the meter. When you open a new test strip vial write the date on the outside.

Note: Most test strips need to be thrown out 6 months after opening.

- ☐ Lancing device and lancets to prick your finger
- ☐ Insulin (like aspart-Novolog) & syringes to help lower blood sugar levels quickly
- ☐ Glucagon® kit for emergency low blood sugars

When to call

- Call your doctor or Consulting Nurse Service if:
- You aren't sure how to take care of yourself
- You've been throwing up or have had diarrhea for more than 6 hours
- You've been sick or have had a fever for more than one day and aren't getting better
- You feel like you're going to faint, even though you've been drinking enough liquids
- You have signs of being dehydrated, such as dry tongue, dry or cracked lips
- You have trouble breathing or your chest hurts
- Your blood sugar levels are unexpectedly high (300 mg/dl or higher) and stay that way for several hours, especially if you're also throwing up or have diarrhea.

Information to give when you call:

- ☐ How long you've been sick and what your symptoms are
- ☐ What medicines you've taken and how much
- ☐ Your blood sugar tests – the times and results
- ☐ What you've had to eat or drink and whether or not you've been able to keep it down
- ☐ What your temperature readings have been and when you took them

Consulting Nurse Service:

- Call 24 hours a day: toll-free 1-800-297-6877
- Visit the Health and Wellness Resources section on the Kaiser Permanente website at kp.org/wa for more information about diabetes and other health topics.