Sick-Day Plans

If you have diabetes

This handout for people with diabetes explains what to do when you are sick to prevent problems with your blood glucose levels. Talk with your healthcare team to develop sick-day plans for your specific needs.

When you are ill, it can be harder to control your blood glucose levels. Talk with your healthcare team about what to do when you are sick. Knowing how to manage your diabetes during illness can help keep a minor illness from becoming a major problem.

Illness and Diabetic Ketoacidosis

When you are ill or under emotional stress, your body releases hormones that can raise your blood glucose levels. If there is not enough insulin in your bloodstream to use this glucose, your body starts to break down fat to use for energy.

This breakdown of fat creates waste products called ketones. If these ketones build up in your bloodstream, they can cause diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA). DKA can be very dangerous, or even deadly. But, DKA is mostly a concern for people with type 1 diabetes. It rarely occurs in people with type 2 diabetes.

DKA can occur even when you are healthy, but it is more likely to occur when you are ill and your body is under extra stress. The good news is that DKA has many warning signs, so it does not need to be fatal.

People with type 1 diabetes, or people who have needed to use insulin for type 2 diabetes for many years should know:

• How to prevent DKA
• How to recognize the signs of DKA
• What to do if you think you have DKA

Schedule an appointment to talk with your diabetes care provider if you have any questions about how to manage your diabetes and prevent DKA.
Preventing DKA When You Are Sick

If You Have Type 1 Diabetes

• Keep taking your insulin! Your body may actually need more than your usual amount of insulin when you are sick, even if you are eating very little, or if you are nauseated or vomiting.

• While you are sick, try to eat or drink at least 150 grams of carbohydrate every 24 hours. Otherwise, your body can develop a kind of ketoacidosis called “starvation” ketoacidosis. There is a list of soft foods and liquids that are easy to digest on page 3 of this handout.

• Stay hydrated. Drink lots of carbohydrate-free liquids such as teas without caffeine, broth, water, or diet sodas. Avoid liquids that contain caffeine because they can dehydrate you even more.

• Go to the emergency room or see your healthcare provider if you can’t keep liquids down.

• Know how and when to reach your healthcare team after clinic hours. Remember, calling early could mean the difference between treatment at home and a trip to the hospital.

• Learn how to test your urine with ketone test strips. Keep fresh ones on hand. The single strips that are wrapped in foil stay fresh much longer than other brands.

• As soon as you see signs of illness, start testing and recording your glucose level and urine ketones. Do this at least every 2 to 4 hours.

• DKA can develop even without very high glucose levels, so call your healthcare team if:
  - You vomit more than once.
  - You have moderate to large urine ketones (dark pink or purple on the test strip).
  - Your blood glucose stays over 250 even after you try to bring it down.
  - Your condition keeps getting worse, or lasts longer than 24 hours.

• If you live alone, make plans for a relative, friend, or neighbor to check on you at least once a day.

If You Have Type 2 Diabetes

• As soon as you see signs of illness, start checking your blood glucose levels at least 4 times a day, before meals and at bedtime, even if you do not usually check it that often. Write down the results so you have them handy if you need to call your healthcare team.
• Increase your fluid intake as much as you can.
  - If your glucose levels are staying mostly under 240 mg/dL, you can
    drink some liquids that contain carbohydrate, such as juice.
  - If your glucose is staying mostly over 240 mg/dL, most of the liquids
    you drink should be sugar-free.

• Do not stop taking your diabetes medicine unless your healthcare team
tells you to. If you use metformin (Glucophage), find out if you need to
stop using it when you are ill. This is very important if you have been
vomiting or have diarrhea.

• If you vomit more than once, call your healthcare team for advice. You
may need to adjust your diabetes medicine or food choices.

**Sick-Day Foods**

When you are sick, the most important thing to do is to drink lots of fluids!
Unless you are on a fluid-restricted plan, try to drink at least 8 cups of
caffeine-free liquids every day.

If you cannot eat regular foods, try some soft solids or liquid foods, such as
the ones listed below. You may see some foods on the list that you usually
avoid. Remember, on sick days, these foods are taking the place of your
regular foods, and it is OK to eat them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soft Foods</th>
<th>Carbohydrates (grams)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 small slice bread or toast</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 saltine crackers</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ cup hot cereal</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 cup clear soup containing noodles or rice</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ cup tapioca made with milk</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ cup custard</td>
<td>15 to 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 ounces “light” yogurt</td>
<td>20 to 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ cup apple or orange juice</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ twin popsicle</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ cup plain ice cream</td>
<td>15 to 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ cup cottage cheese</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Questions?*

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare
provider if you have questions or concerns.

Endocrine and Diabetes Care Center: 206.598.4882
UW Medicine Neighborhood Clinics: 206.520.5000
Other patients: Please call your healthcare provider:
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