

When You're Sick...

Being sick can make your blood glucose (sugar) level go up very high. It can also cause serious conditions that can put you in a coma. The best way to prevent a minor illness from becoming a major problem is to work out a plan of action for sick days ahead of time. Then when you become sick, you will feel safe and secure. You will already know what to do and you will have the supplies on-hand to do it.

What Happens When You're Sick

When you're sick, you're under stress. To deal with this stress, your body releases hormones that help it fight disease. But these hormones have side effects. They raise blood sugar levels and interfere with the blood sugar-lowering effects of insulin.

As a result, when you are sick, it is harder to keep your blood sugar in your target range. Ketoacidosis leading to a diabetic coma can develop, particularly in people with type 1 diabetes. People with type 2 diabetes, especially older people, can develop a similar condition called hyperosmolar hyperglycemic nonketotic coma. Both conditions are dangerous and can be life-threatening.

Making a Sick-Day Plan


Prepare a plan for sick days in advance. Work with your doctor or a diabetes educator. The plan will include when to call your diabetes team, how often to measure blood sugar and urine ketones, what medicines to take, and how to eat.

Also, attach to your plan a list of phone numbers for your doctor, diabetes educator, and dietitian. Make sure you also know how to reach them at night and on weekends and holidays. Then when illness strikes, you will be ready.

When to Call Your Diabetes Team

You do not need to call your team every time you have a sniffle. But you will probably want to call if certain things happen. For example, if you have:

- Fever or illness for a couple of days and aren't getting better
- Vomiting or diarrhea for more than 6 hours
- Moderate to large amounts of ketones in your urine
- Glucose levels higher than 240, despite insulin or medication per MD
- You take pills for your diabetes but blood sugars are 240 before meals and for more than 24 hours
- Chest pain, difficulty breathing, fruity breath, dry, cracked lips or tongue
- You aren't certain what to do to take care of yourself



Be ready to tell what medicines you've taken and how much, how long you've been sick, whether you can eat and keep food down, whether you've lost weight, and what your temperature, blood sugar level, and urine ketone level are. To be prepared, keep written records of all these things as soon as you become sick.

Keep Your Notebook Handy

No matter what kind of diabetes you have, measure your blood sugar and urine ketones more often than usual. If you have type 1 diabetes, you may need to measure blood sugar and urine ketones every four hours. Measuring ketones is very important because these waste products are more likely to build up when you are sick and lead to ketoacidosis.

If you have type 2 diabetes, checking blood sugar four times a day may be enough. You might only need to measure ketones if your blood sugar is higher than 300. If you do not have a meter, talk to your diabetes educator about getting one.

Diabetes Medicines

When sick, you will still need to continue medicine for your diabetes. Even if you are throwing up, don't stop your medicines. You need them because your body makes extra glucose (sugar) when you are sick.


If you have type 1 diabetes, you may have to take extra insulin to bring down the higher blood sugar levels. If you have type 2 diabetes, you may be able to take your pills, or you may need to use insulin for a short time. In either case, work with your diabetes team to develop your sick-day plan.

Food

Eating and drinking can be a big problem when you're sick. But it's important to stick to your normal meal plan if you can. In addition to your normal meals, drink lots of non-caloric liquids to keep from getting dehydrated. These are liquids like water and diet soft drinks. It's easy to run low on fluids when you are vomiting or have a fever or diarrhea. Extra fluids will also help get rid of the extra sugar (and possibly, ketones) in your blood.

But what if you can't stick to your normal meal plan? Your sick-day plan should contain a meal plan. Try to take in your normal number of calories by eating easy-on-the-stomach foods like regular (non-diet) gelatin, crackers, soups, and applesauce.

If even these mild foods are too hard to eat, you may have to stick to drinking liquids that contain carbohydrates. Aim for 50 grams of carbohydrate every three to four hours. Your sick-day plan may include regular (not diet) soft drinks. Other high-carbohydrate liquids and almost-liquids are juice, frozen juice bars, sherbet, pudding, creamed soups, and fruit-flavored yogurt. Broth is also a good choice.



To prepare for sick days, have on-hand at home a small stock of non-diet soft drinks, broth, applesauce, and regular gelatin.

Handy Sick-Day Snacks

These foods contain between 10 and 15 grams of carbohydrates.

Fluids

- 1 double-stick popsicle
- 1 cup Gatorade
- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup soup
- 1/2 cup fruit juice
- 1/2 cup regular soft drink (not diet)

Foods

6 saltines	5 vanilla wafers
4 Lifesavers	3 graham crackers
1 slice dry toast (not light bread)	1/2 cup cooked cereal
1/3 cup frozen yogurt	1/2 cup regular ice cream
1/2 cup sugar-free pudding	1/2 cup regular (not sugar-free)
1/2 cup custard	1/2 cup mashed potatoes
1/4 cup sherbet	1/4 cup regular pudding

Typical Sick Day Menu (45g carb per meal)

Breakfast: 2 pieces toast, 1 poached egg, 1/2 cup apple juice

Lunch: 1 cup chicken noodle soup, grilled cheese sandwich, diet pop

Dinner: (sample liquid meal for nausea or diarrhea)

1/2 cup gelatin (regular), clear broth, 1/2 cup regular soda pop, 6 saltines

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