



# Taking Care of Your Diabetes: Managing Sick Days and Infections

Colds, flu, and infections can happen at any time. If you have diabetes, being sick can cause your blood sugar to get too high. When you are not feeling well, you may not be able to eat or exercise as usual. These changes in your usual routine can affect your blood sugar control. Infections in any part of your body, including teeth or gums, can cause high blood sugar. Good dental hygiene and regular check-ups with your dentist are important ways to prevent this type of infection from starting.

## How much medication should I take?

Keep taking your usual dose of diabetes medications or insulin, unless your diabetes care team advises you to make changes while you are sick. If you are on insulin, your diabetes care team may suggest you use extra insulin.

An exception is if you take metformin (*Glucophage*). Stop taking this medicine temporarily when you have nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea. Call the Appointment and Advice line for the facility near you to get instructions on when to begin taking metformin again when you are feeling better.

Carefully select over-the-counter cold and flu medications to make sure they are safe for you to use and will not affect blood sugar. You can e-mail a pharmacist at [kp.org/pharmacist](mailto:kp.org/pharmacist) for recommendations, or consult a pharmacist at your local Kaiser Permanente pharmacy. Add these items to your sick day kit listed on the other side of this page.

Write down the following information and have it ready when you call the Appointment and Advice Call Center or your diabetes care team:

1. How long you have been sick: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Your temperature: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Your blood sugar levels and urine ketone test results: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_
4. Whether you are throwing up or have diarrhea: \_\_\_\_\_
5. The last time you urinated: \_\_\_\_\_
6. How much food and liquids you have had: \_\_\_\_\_
7. How much and what type of diabetes medicine you have taken and the time you took it; other medications you have taken: \_\_\_\_\_
8. Any other symptoms, including your mood: \_\_\_\_\_

## What foods and drinks can I have when I am sick?

When you aren't feeling good, you may not want to eat three meals a day. If you are too sick to keep anything down and your blood sugar is under 240 mg/dL, it is OK to have foods that are not "diet," such as regular gelatin or *Gatorade*. The chart on the back of this page lists easy-to-tolerate foods. All of these items have about 15 grams of carbohydrate. Try to eat or drink one of these foods or beverages every hour when your blood sugar is below 240mg/dL. If your blood sugar is over 240mg/dL, try to eat or drink them every two hours.

## Self-care tips to manage your diabetes on sick days

When you are not feeling well, it is easy to forget your daily self-care tasks. However, monitoring your blood sugar and other symptoms is very important on sick days. Here are some simple guidelines:

- Test your blood sugar 2 to 4 times a day. If your blood sugar is over 300 mg/dL, test every 3 to 4 hours.
- Track how much fluid you drink. To prevent dehydration, try to sip at least eight ounces (1 cup) of fluids every hour while awake.
- Check your temperature twice a day and record it.
- If you take insulin, and if your blood sugar is above 300 mg/dL, test your urine for ketones.\* Record whether you have small, moderate, or large amounts. Your blood glucose meter will remind you to test for ketones when a blood sugar level is over 240 mg/dL.

\*Ketones are a certain type of chemical that forms in your blood when your body starts to breakdown fat to use for energy instead of glucose. This happens when you have high blood sugar levels and not enough insulin in your body. When the level of ketones in your blood gets too high, your kidneys help to remove it from your blood so it appears in your urine.

If you feel symptoms of low blood sugar, check your blood sugar. If it is 70 mg/dL or lower, eat a fast-acting source of sugar with about 15 grams of carbohydrate, like 3 or 4 glucose tabs or a glucose gel tube. Re-check your blood sugar to make sure it is rising closer to normal. Then eat something more to keep your blood sugar level in the normal range.



# Taking Care of Your Diabetes: Managing Sick Days and Infections

What to eat		What to drink
1/2 cup gelatin/ Jell-O*	6 saltines	1/2 cup juice
1/2 cup applesauce	1/2 cup cooked cereal	1/2 cup regular* or caffeine-free soda
6 oz. yogurt, plain or artificially sweetened	6 vanilla wafers	1 cup <i>Gatorade</i> *
1/2 banana	1/2 cup custard	water
1 slice toast or bread	1 popsicle	herbal tea
3 graham crackers	1/4 cup sherbet	broth
1/2 cup pudding*	1/2 cup ice cream	clear soups
	1/2 cup mashed potato	

\* Be sure to use calorie-free and/or sugar-free products if blood sugars are over 240 mg/dL.

## Call the advice nurse or your diabetes care team when:

- Your blood sugar is less than 60mg/dL two times in one day.
- Your blood sugar is over 300 mg/dL for 2 days or your blood sugars are much higher than they usually are.
- Your temperature is over 100° F for 2 days.
- You have diarrhea for more than 6 hours.
- You have vomited more than once.
- You have small to moderate ketones in your urine.
- You experience deep or troubled breathing; dry, cracked lips, mouth, or tongue; or have a fruity odor to your breath.
- You have been sick for two days, and you are not getting better.
- You are not sure what you need to do to take care of yourself.

## Get emergency care right away if you have:

- Blood sugar over 500mg/dL.
- Moderate to large amounts of ketones in your urine.

Be sure to talk to your family, friends, or caregivers about what to do when you have a diabetes emergency. Teach them:

- How to recognize and help you manage your low blood sugar. Your health care professional may prescribe a glucagon kit for you if you use insulin, and are at high risk for extremely low blood sugar.
- Make sure they know what steps to take if you lose consciousness or remain unconscious.

## Prepare a Sick Day Kit

Talk with your diabetes care team or pharmacist beforehand about what medications you may need to help manage sick days to make sure they are appropriate for you. Routinely check the expiration date of products and replace them if they have expired.

Here are some suggested items to have on hand before you get sick:

- List of sick day foods and beverages (in case someone should shop for you)
- Sugar-free cough medicine and throat lozenges
- Thermometer
- Aspirin or *Tylenol* (acetaminophen)
- For diarrhea: *Imodium* (for adults) or *Kaopectate* (for children)

- Nasal decongestants: *Neo-synephrine* or *Afrin*
- Rectal suppositories for severe nausea (Available by prescription)
- *Ketostix* (unopened, foil wrapped)
- An extra bottle of quick acting insulin as prescribed by your doctor
- Phone number for the Appointment and Advice Line (advice nurse) or health care team at the facility nearest to you
- Phone numbers for friends or relatives who are able to help you

## Other resources

- Visit [kp.org/mydoctor](http://kp.org/mydoctor), if you are a member in Northern California. Try one of our Online Health Coach video coaching programs available through your doctor's Home Page. Start today to improve your eating habits and get more active.
- Visit our Web site at [kp.org/diabetes](http://kp.org/diabetes). Here you will find more information about diabetes and other topics.
- Try our personalized online programs at [kp.org/healthyliving](http://kp.org/healthyliving) to get support for your weight loss and activity goals.
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Contact your facility's Health Education Center or Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.