



KAISER PERMANENTE®

Vomiting, Diarrhea, and Other Illnesses in Diabetics

People with diabetes know how important it is to keep their diabetes under control. But control of diabetes can be upset by many illnesses. For example, certain illnesses can cause your blood sugar to rise, making you lose vital fluids and minerals. Vomiting and diarrhea cause even further loss of fluids and minerals. This can be very serious for someone with diabetes. Poor control of diabetes can lead to coma and sometimes even death.

When illness threatens to throw your diabetes out of control, you must act promptly and take the following three precautions:

- 1.) manage the illness;
- 2.) control your blood sugar level; and
- 3.) maintain a good fluid and mineral balance.

Let's discuss these three precautions one at a time:

First, you'll need to manage the illness. The first question you should ask yourself is: "What type of illness do I have?" If it's a mild flu, a cold, or an intestinal infection, you probably won't have much trouble. But if you are very ill, or think you have a bacterial infection, such as Strep throat, pneumonia, severe bronchitis, an ear infection, or a urinary tract infection, contact your advice nurse, doctor, or health care professional. Antibiotics will be needed for a bacterial infection.

The second precaution you'll need to take when ill is to carefully control your blood sugar. Even mild illnesses can disrupt blood sugar levels, especially with type 1 diabetes, so you should be even more alert than usual during this period. Continue to take your insulin or oral medication when you're sick. In fact, your body sometimes needs more insulin during an illness, so ask your doctor or health care professional about when you might require extra insulin doses.

Occasionally, less insulin is needed if you are not eating much. This is why you should test your blood sugar often. Your doctor or health care professional may ask you to check your urine for sugar and ketones—especially if you have type 1 diabetes. If your blood shows 300 milligrams or more of sugar or if your urine shows moderate or large ketones, call your doctor or health care professional. Generally speaking, if your ketones are negative, you can feel comfortable that you are not badly out of control, even if your blood sugar is running somewhat high.

It's important to eat even if you don't have an appetite. If you're unable to eat in your normal manner, try eating six to eight lighter snacks throughout the day. Foods that may be easiest to eat

include toast, crackers, unsweetened cereal, mashed potatoes, rice, soup, canned fruit, or yogurt. If you follow a meal plan, use your exchange list to substitute foods you can tolerate.

If nausea and vomiting are a problem, drink clear, non-caloric liquids, such as water or diet soda, every half hour to prevent dehydration. This is especially important if you're unable to eat solid foods. Two to three ounces of liquid per hour should help prevent low blood sugar.

Finally, the third precaution you'll need to take when ill is to maintain your fluid and mineral balance. This is important even if you're not vomiting. Drink eight to ten glasses of broth, water, Gatorade, or juice every day. A variety of fluids is recommended. If you're having three or more watery bowel movements, you may need even more fluids.

If you can't keep down any liquids, or if these measures don't control your diabetes, call your health care professional. If you suspect you're having an insulin reaction, drink half a glass of apple juice or non-diet soda and call your health care professional. You should also check your blood glucose levels. If they're down, try to eat solid food.



For additional health information you can trust:

- Log on to our members-only Web site at www.kaiserpermanente.org/california, then click the "Kaiser Permanente Members Only" button
- Visit your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center
- Check your Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone messages at 1-800-33 ASK ME (1-800-332-7563)

To get your free Handbook and Healthphone Directory, call 1-800-464-4000.

The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care. If you have persistent health problems or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor or other health care professional.

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REGIONAL HEALTH EDUCATION