



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 checkups 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 doctor or health care professional advises you to make changes while you are sick. If you are on insulin, your doctor or health care professional may suggest you use extra insulin.

There is an exception to this recommendation 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.

If you choose to use over-the-counter medications, look for sugar-free products and others that do not affect your blood sugars. If you have questions about which products to use, contact a pharmacist at your local Kaiser Permanente pharmacy, or through the Pharmacy Center at kp.org.

Write down the following information and have it ready when you call the Appointment and Advice line, your doctor, or your health care professional:

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 unable to keep any food in your stomach (due to throwing up) and your blood sugar is under 240 mg/dL, it is OK to have foods that are not "diet," such as regular gelatin or a sports drink (such as 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 240 mg/dL. If your blood sugar is over 240 mg/dL, try to eat or drink them every 2 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 8 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. **Get emergency care right away if your blood sugar is 500 mg/dL or above.***

*Ketones are a type of chemical that forms in your blood when your body starts to break down 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 50 to 70 mg/dL, eat a fast-acting source of sugar with about 15 grams of carbohydrate, like 3 or 4 glucose tabs or a glucose gel tube. If your blood

What to eat		What to drink
½ cup gelatin (such as Jell-O)*	6 saltines	½ cup juice
½ cup applesauce	½ cup cooked cereal	½ cup regular* or caffeine-free soda
6 oz. yogurt, plain or artificially sweetened	6 vanilla wafers	1 cup sports drink (such as Gatorade)*
½ banana	½ cup custard	water
1 slice toast or bread	1 popsicle	herbal tea
3 graham crackers	¼ cup sherbet	broth
½ cup pudding*	½ cup ice cream	clear soups
	½ cup mashed potato	

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

sugar is less than 50, eat or drink 2 carbohydrate sources (30 grams total). 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.

Call the advice nurse or your doctor or health care professional when:

- Your blood sugar is less than 70 mg/dL 2 times in 1 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 thrown up 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 2 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 either of the following:

- Blood sugar over 500 mg/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 doctor or health care professional may prescribe a glucagon kit for you if you use insulin and are at high risk for extremely low blood sugar.
- The appropriate steps to take if you lose consciousness or remain unconscious.

Prepare a Sick Day Kit

You may need certain medications to help manage sick days. Talk with your diabetes care team or pharmacist beforehand to make sure you have the medications that 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 and any other over-the-counter medications
- Thermometer
- Aspirin or acetaminophen (such as Tylenol)
- For diarrhea: loperamide (such as Imodium, for adults) or bismuth

subsalicylate (such as Kaopectate) for children

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

Other resources

- Visit kp.org/mydoctor.
- Try our personalized online programs at kp.org/healthyliving to get support for your weight loss and activity goals.
- Contact your facility's Health Education Center or Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.
- If you are hit, hurt, or threatened by a partner or spouse, this can seriously affect your health. There is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to ndvh.org.

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. Some photos may include models and not actual patients.