

Managing Sick Days and Health Situations

Part of the *Learning to Live Well with Diabetes* Series

Welcome! A diabetes diagnosis can feel overwhelming. There is so much to learn and so much to do. The **Learning to Live Well with Diabetes** series was created to share clear, practical information and resources to offer support without adding extra stress. Setting small, manageable goals over time can help relieve stress and lead to lasting health improvements, and you don't have to do it alone. Please take what is helpful to you on your journey and leave the rest.

If you need help accessing or understanding this information, contact:

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Health Situations May Affect Your Diabetes

Diabetes management isn't just about blood sugar; it's about planning ahead for things that place extra stress on the body. Everyday sickness and other health-related situations can affect your diabetes. We'll take a closer look at some common situations below and review some tips to help you care for yourself when you're not feeling your best. Be sure to let your health care team know if you have any concerns such as transportation, medication costs or anything else that could make managing sickness or other health related situations more difficult to manage or recover from.



Some health-related situations that may affect your diabetes include:

- **Illness**
- **Surgery or medical procedures**
- **Stress and emotional health**
- **Vaccines**
- **Pregnancy**
- **Starting or pausing medications**
- **Poor sleep**
- **Dental care**



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Illness

When you are sick (like with a cold, flu, stomach bug or infection), your body releases hormones that help fight illness. These hormones can also make it harder for insulin to work, causing your blood sugar to rise, even if you are eating less than usual. Sickness can make it difficult to eat, drink enough fluids or take your usual medicines, which can increase the risk of both high and low blood sugar. Having a plan for managing diabetes when you are sick can help you stay safe, recover more comfortably and know when to contact your health care team. **There is a full checklist of considerations for managing sick days at the end of this document.**



Surgery or medical procedures

Surgery and procedures can affect blood sugar because of stress, changes in eating and medication adjustments.

- Ask what to do with diabetes medications before and after the procedure.
- Know when to stop eating or drinking before surgery.
- Monitor blood sugar closely after surgery.
- Resume eating and medications as directed.



Stress and emotional health

Emotional stress can affect blood sugar by causing your body to release hormones that make it harder for insulin to work. Stress may also change your eating, sleeping, physical activity or medication routines, making blood sugar harder to manage.

- Check blood sugar more often during times of increased stress.
- Continue taking diabetes medications as prescribed.
- Try different ways to manage stress, such as taking a walk, practicing deep breathing, extra rest, connecting with family or friends or doing an activity you enjoy.
- Reach out to your health care team if stress is making it difficult to manage your diabetes.



Vaccines

Vaccines are an important part of supporting your health. They help protect you from illnesses that can make diabetes harder to manage. After getting a vaccine, your immune system responds by building protection. This response may cause your blood sugar to rise for a short time, but it usually returns to normal within a few days.

- Check your blood sugar more often for a day or two after getting a vaccine if recommended by your health care team.
- Stay hydrated and continue taking diabetes medications as prescribed.
- Be aware that mild side effects, such as fatigue, muscle aches or a low-grade fever, are common and usually go away within a few days.
- Contact your health care provider if you have persistent high blood sugar, are unable to keep fluids down or have severe or unusual symptoms after vaccination.



Pregnancy:

Pregnancy can change how your body uses insulin and may affect your blood sugar. Managing diabetes before, during, and after pregnancy can help support the health of both you and your baby.

- Talk with your health care team if you are planning a pregnancy or think you may be pregnant.
- Work with your health care team to develop a plan for managing blood sugar during pregnancy.
- Take diabetes medications and prenatal vitamins as directed.
- Attend regular prenatal and diabetes care appointments to monitor your health and your baby's development.



Starting or Pausing Medications:

Starting new medications

Some medications can affect blood sugar levels or interact with diabetes medications. Steroids (like prednisone) often raise blood sugar, sometimes significantly. Some antibiotics and other prescription medications may also affect blood sugar. Over-the-counter medicines for colds and coughs may contain sugar or ingredients that raise blood sugar.

- Tell every health care provider and pharmacist that you have diabetes.
- Ask whether a new medication may affect your blood sugar or interact with your diabetes medications.
- Check your blood sugar more often if recommended after starting or changing a medication.

Pausing medications

You may need to temporarily pause certain medications during illnesses that cause vomiting, diarrhea, dehydration or poor fluid intake. This includes some diabetes medications as well as medications for blood pressure or kidney disease. Because recommendations depend on each person's health and the specific medication, it's important to follow the sick-day plan developed with your health care team rather than stopping medications on your own.

- Never stop or change a prescribed medication without talking with your health care team.
- Ask if any medications should be temporarily paused when you are sick, dehydrated or having surgery or a medical procedure.
- Check your blood sugar more often if recommended after stopping or changing a medication.



Poor Sleep:

Not getting enough sleep or having poor-quality sleep can make it harder for your body to use insulin and may cause blood sugar to rise. Poor sleep can also affect your mood, energy, appetite and ability to manage your diabetes.

- Aim for a regular sleep schedule and get enough sleep each night.
- Check your blood sugar more often if poor sleep is affecting your diabetes.
- Talk with your health care provider if you have trouble falling asleep, staying asleep or feel very tired during the day.
- Ask about testing for sleep apnea if you snore loudly, stop breathing during sleep, or wake up feeling unrefreshed.



Dental Care:

Dental procedures and mouth infections can affect your blood sugar and may make it harder to eat or drink. Planning ahead and treating dental problems early can help you manage your diabetes and support healing.

- Tell your dentist you have diabetes before any procedure.
- Ask whether you need to adjust your diabetes medications before or after dental treatment.
- Monitor your blood sugar more often if you have a mouth infection or difficulty eating.
- Contact your dentist if you notice swelling, severe pain, pus or a fever.

Managing Sick Days

A simple plan can help you stay safe and feel better. If a family member, friend or caregiver assists you with your diabetes care, consider sharing your sick-day plan and emergency contact information with them, so they can help. Your sick day plan is individual to you, and it may change over time. Consider asking your health care provider to look at your plan with you in case they have suggestions. **Some things to consider including in your plan are:**



Keep taking your diabetes medicines

- Take insulin and other diabetes medicines as prescribed (unless instructed otherwise).
- Illness can make blood sugar go up even if you are eating less.
- If you are unsure about doses, contact your health care provider.



Check your blood sugar more often

- Check every 3–4 hours, or as advised.
- Write down your results if you can.
- Blood sugar may rise or fall quickly when you are sick.



Drink plenty of fluids

If you cannot eat, fluids are still very important.

- Try to drink small amounts often.
 - Water
 - Broth or soup
 - Sugar-free drinks



Try to eat small, simple foods

If blood sugar is low, you may need foods or drinks with carbohydrate.

- Even if you are not hungry, try small amounts of:
 - Crackers or toast
 - Rice or noodles
 - Applesauce
 - Soup
 - Yogurt

Advice for managing sick days continues on the next page.



Watch your blood sugar symptoms

High blood sugar signs:

- Very thirsty
- Frequent urination
- Nausea or stomach upset
- Feeling very tired

Low blood sugar signs:

- Shaky or sweaty
- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Fast heartbeat



Use a sick-day kit (if you have one)

Keep these supplies together:

- Blood sugar meter and strips
- Medicines and insulin
- Fast-acting sugar (juice, glucose tabs)
- Easy foods and drinks
- Ketone strips (if used)
- Contact numbers for your care team



Call your health care team if:

- You cannot keep food or fluids down
- Vomiting or diarrhea lasts more than a few hours
- Blood sugar stays very high (e.g., over 300 mg/dL)
- You have moderate or large ketones
- You are unsure what to do with your medicines



Get urgent care right away if:

- Trouble breathing
- Chest pain
- Confusion or hard to wake up
- Signs of severe dehydration (very dry mouth, very little urine)

Remember

Rest is part of healing. A simple plan, steady fluids, and regular monitoring can help you stay rested and stay safe while your body recovers.