



Managing Diabetes on Sick Days

Planning ahead will help you be prepared to handle sick days with confidence. Getting sick can raise or lower blood sugar levels, making it more difficult to control diabetes and stay within your blood sugar target range. You will need to take special care of yourself when you are sick.

On Days That You Feel Sick



Check your blood sugar more often, at least every 3 to 4 hours.



Try to eat the same amount of carbohydrates that you normally do.



Keep taking your diabetes pills and injectable medications, even if you cannot eat, unless your healthcare practitioner tells you otherwise.



Drink plenty of fluids to keep your body from getting dry or dehydrated.



Follow your normal meal plan as close as possible.



Record your blood sugar levels, symptoms, the medications you take, and the food and drinks you consume.



Be sure to have your written record available when you talk to your healthcare practitioner.

When You Get Sick



When you get sick, your body sees the illness as stress.

To relieve the stress, your body releases energy, which makes your blood sugar rise. Even a minor illness can lead to dangerously high blood sugar levels and require emergency medical care.

Loss of appetite, nausea, and vomiting can make it harder to follow your usual meal plan.

Poor intake of food can cause your blood sugar levels to fall too low.

Make a Sick Day Plan

Plan ahead before you get sick. Work with your healthcare team to help you develop an action plan for sick days.

Include these things in your sick day plan:

- Check your blood sugar more often, at least every 3 to 4 hours
- Make sure you know your blood sugar target range and learn what to do if your blood sugar is too high or too low
- Continue taking your diabetes pills and injectable medications
- Never stop taking your medications, even when you are not feeling well, unless your healthcare practitioner says you should



Blood sugar is too high.



Blood sugar is too low.

Make a Sick Day Plan Continued...

- If your blood sugar gets too high or falls too low, you may have to change how much medication you take. Follow your healthcare practitioner's instructions about if or when you should adjust your medication plan
- Check with your healthcare practitioner or pharmacist before taking any over-the-counter medications to make sure they are safe to use when you have diabetes
- Continue taking your other prescription medications as directed
- Do not change or stop taking prescription medications without first talking to your healthcare practitioner
- Follow your normal meal plan, even if you don't feel like eating or drinking
- Drink 1 to 2 cups of water and sugar-free, caffeine-free liquids every hour to keep your body from getting dry or dehydrated. Drinking liquids helps remove extra sugar in your blood and replace fluids lost due to vomiting, fever, or diarrhea
- Keep a small stock of easy-on-the-stomach foods, such as crackers, soup, yogurt, and applesauce, on hand for sick days unless you are allergic to them. If you find these mild foods too hard to eat, try to drink enough fluids that contain carbohydrates every 3 to 4 hours, such as juice, frozen juice bars, broth, and regular (not diet) soda that doesn't contain caffeine
- Drink enough fluids that contain the same amount of carbohydrates that you would normally eat
- Keep a written sick-day record when you are sick. Write down your blood sugar levels, symptoms, the amount of medications you take, when you take them, and the food and drinks you consume. Be sure to have this information with you when you talk to your healthcare practitioner
- Ask for help when you need it. It can be difficult to manage diabetes on your own when you are sick
- Let family and friends know when you are sick and ask them to check in on you. They can provide you with support and help to keep you safe



Call your healthcare practitioner right away if you:

- Cannot keep fluids down for more than 4 hours
- Have been throwing up or have diarrhea that lasts more than 6 hours
- Have a blood sugar level that stays over 300 or under 70
- Have not eaten normally for more than 24 hours
- Have trouble breathing
- Cannot stay awake or think clearly

To find out more about how to manage diabetes on sick days, talk to your healthcare practitioner.

The information in this handout is intended to supplement the information you receive from your healthcare practitioner and should never be considered personal medical advice. Always contact your healthcare practitioner with health questions and concerns.