

Diabetes Sick Day: prevention, planning and management



Sick Days and Diabetes

A “sick day” is any time that an infection or other physical stress on the body is present. Even a minor cold can make your diabetes harder to control. Usually, blood sugar levels rise during an illness even if you are eating less food than normal. To help fight an illness or injury, your body releases hormones that cause your liver to release extra glucose and this interferes with the action of insulin. High blood sugar can make it hard for your body to fight illness, so it is important to plan ahead and be prepared for sick days.

A good place to start is to work on a plan to prevent and manage illness. This might include the following:

- If you have not had a pneumonia vaccine, talk to your doctor about getting one. Have your annual flu shot as well as the H1N1 or swine flu vaccine.
- Frequent hand washing, especially when in public places, and avoiding people who are exhibiting respiratory infections can help reduce exposure risks.
- Keep glucose levels in your “target range”. Many people find that they are more likely to get sick when their diabetes is out of control. More frequent blood glucose monitoring is usually recommended (up to every 2 to 4 hours may be needed) when you are ill. Check urine ketones if your blood glucose rises over 250, and contact your provider if you detect persistent moderate or large ketone levels.
- Drink 8-10 glasses of water a day. Try at least sips of liquid every ½ to 1 hours.
- If you are unable to eat your meals, drink Sugar-free, caffeine-free fluids such as: water, tea, broth and diet ginger-ale, **then on alternating hours** use 4 – 6 ounces of liquids containing sugar such as 7-Up, Sprite, Apple juice, Gatorade, regular gelatin. The items with sugar should be in small amounts. If you can tolerate some solids, foods such as applesauce, oatmeal, saltine crackers, popsicles and pudding are easy to eat when you don’t feel well.
- Make your shopping list now and store sick day items out of sight. Check your medicine cabinet for over-the-counter medications your provider has approved for fever, diarrhea or nausea and keep these stocked.
- Unless your doctor advises you otherwise, take all of your medications as prescribed, every day. Do not skip or double up on any medication. Appetite may be decreased but blood glucose may still rise due to stress and infection.
- Always wear some form of medical identification. A bracelet is a good choice since it can be easily seen. Another idea is to carry an I.D. card in your wallet next to your driver’s license. Remember, this medical identification speaks for you if you are not able to.
- Talk with your doctor about what you should do when you are sick. When you’re sick and call the doctor, be prepared to report your blood sugar and ketone results, temperature, symptoms such as abdominal pain, vomiting or diarrhea, oral intake as well as any treatments you are using.

