Sick Days

Note to the Health Care Professional: Topics in this handout are discussed in Chapter 19 of the *American Dietetic Association Guide to Diabetes Medical Nutrition Therapy and Education* (1).

When counseling clients about sick day management, consider the following strategies:

- Emphasizing that clients should continue to use medications and insulin when they are sick
- Explaining that clients may need to adjust or add insulin to control their blood glucose
- Discussing use of urinary ketone testing when ill
- Helping clients develop a plan for what to do in the event of illness
- Discussing times when they need to contact their health care team

Reference

Sick Days

Illness and Blood Glucose
For people with diabetes, being sick with the flu or another illness can raise blood glucose to unsafe levels. Sometimes, your blood glucose may go up before you start to feel sick. The medications you take when you are ill also may raise your blood glucose.

People with diabetes need to plan ahead for when they get sick. Following a sick-day plan will help you keep your blood glucose in target ranges and feel better faster.

What to Do When You Are Sick

- Keep taking any medications that are part of your diabetes treatment plan.
- Talk with your doctor about using insulin when you are sick. You may need more insulin when you are ill. People who don’t use insulin may need it when they get sick.
- Drink plenty of water or sugar-free tea or soda, especially if you have a fever. Aim for about one cup per hour, when you are awake.
- Try to eat your regular meals. If you can’t eat full meals, drink regular soda or juice or have foods like toast, pudding and gelatin. Adults should aim to have about 45 to 50 grams of carbohydrates (carbs) every 3 to 4 hours, or about 15 grams an hour while awake. (See Ways to Get 15 Grams of Carbs.)
- Check your blood glucose often (every 2 to 4 hours).
- When your blood glucose is higher than 240mg/dL, check your urine for ketones every 4 hours (unless your doctor gives you other guidelines). Call your health care team if your ketones become moderate to large. You may need medical treatment, extra fluids, or insulin.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways to Get 15 Grams of Carbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>½ cup juice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ cup regular soda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ cup regular fruit gelatin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 saltine crackers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 cup sport drink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ cup sugar-free pudding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ cup cooked cereal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 slice toast</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reasons to Call Your Health Care Team

- Your urine ketones are moderate to large.
- You vomit or have diarrhea for more than 6 hours.
- You have a temperature higher than 102 degrees that does not come down with treatment.
- You have problems breathing or your breath smells like fruit.
- Your blood glucose is over 240 mg/dL before meals for more than 24 hours.
- You are not sure what to do.

Make a Plan

Getting sick can be dangerous, even deadly, for people with diabetes. That’s why it is important to have a sick-day plan. Talk it over with your doctor and diabetes team before you get sick. Be sure to know:

- Which medications are safe to take when you get sick
- What supplies and foods to have on hand
- When and how often to check your blood glucose and urine ketones
- How to eat
- When to call your doctor or health care team (remember to ask for evening and weekend phone numbers)