

Treat Diabetes

Chapter 5

High Blood Sugar (Hyperglycemia)

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1. High Blood Sugar and the Signs and Symptoms

What is high blood sugar?

High blood sugar means your blood sugar level is higher than normal. Over time, too much sugar in your blood leads to serious health problems (diabetes complications). High blood sugar is also known as hyperglycemia.

What are the symptoms of high blood sugar?

Everyone has different signs and symptoms of high blood sugar. You may have any number of the signs and symptoms listed below. High blood sugar signs and symptoms may include:

- Thirsty
- Tired
- Needing to pee more
- Nausea (upset stomach), stomach pain
- Vomiting
- Blurry vision

Many people do not have signs or symptoms of high blood sugar. Check your blood sugar more often if you are ill, have an infection or are undergoing surgery. Talk to your doctor and make a plan for how to manage your diabetes when you are ill.

What is the impact of high blood sugar?

Over time, too much sugar in your body can lead to serious health problems (diabetes complications) like heart attack, stroke, kidney failure, loss of vision, ulcers and even amputation.

Very high blood sugar can be a sign of a serious health problem called diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA) or hyperosmolar hyperglycemic state (HHS). This health problem is not common. Get medical help if you are ill, take insulin and have high blood sugar.

It is crucial that you know how well your diabetes medicines and healthy habits are helping you to manage your blood sugar and reach your A1c target (a measure of how well you managed your blood sugar over the past 3 months). Many people do not have signs or symptoms of high blood sugar. It is important to check your blood sugar regularly so that you know how well you are managing your diabetes between A1c tests. Talk to your doctor about how often you should check your blood sugar.

2. Risk Factors and Treatment for High Blood Sugar

What are the risk factors for high blood sugar?

You are at high risk for high blood sugar if you:

- Did not take enough diabetes medicine(s)
- Are ill (with a cold, infection or having surgery)
- Have stress, depression
- Have too much sugary food or drinks

How do I treat high blood sugar?

Treat high blood sugar by taking your diabetes medicines as prescribed. Talk to your doctor if you cannot get your blood sugar into a normal range for you. You may need to:

- Have your diabetes medicine(s) changed
- Change something in your diet

- Exercise more regularly
- Manage your stress, depression better
- Avoid smoking or exposure to second-hand smoke
- Check your blood sugar more often

If you have high blood sugar and you are ill (cold, infection or surgery) do not stop taking your diabetes medicines. It is crucial that you keep taking your insulin if it is prescribed to you. If you do not take your insulin you are at risk for a serious health problem called diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA) or hyperosmolar hyperglycemic state (HHS). Get medical help if you are ill, take insulin and have high blood sugar.

How do I treat high blood sugar when I am ill?

Continue to take your diabetes medicines (especially if you are prescribed insulin) if you are ill. When you are ill, your blood sugar will likely be high even if you are eating less than normal or vomiting (throwing up). Talk to your doctor, pharmacist or diabetes educator about how to manage your diabetes when you are ill. They may adjust the amount of diabetes medicine you take. They will provide you with specific guidelines to follow when you are ill.

Talk to your doctor so you know:

- How to adjust the amount of diabetes medicine you take
- What medicines you should stop if you are dehydrated (your body does not have enough water)
- How often to check your blood sugar
- When to get medical help

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Follow these tips when you are ill:

- Take time to rest
- Check your blood sugar more often and before meals
- Do not exercise until you feel better
- Drink lots of water. Drink about ½ to 1 cup of fluids each hour. Other medical conditions may tell you to limit your fluids. Do not drink more fluids if this is true. Talk to your doctor for more information
- Take your diabetes medicine when you are sick. This will help control your blood sugar and prevent health problems
- Get medical help right away if your blood sugar remains high

3. How to Prevent High Blood Sugar

You can avoid high blood sugar by:

- Taking your diabetes medicines as prescribed. Read Chapter 7 of this section on Diabetes Medicines to learn more
- Avoiding sugary foods and drinks. Read section, 'Eat Healthy' to learn more
- Exercising. Read section, 'Exercise & Get Active' to learn more
- Managing your stress, depression. Read section, 'Feel Well' to learn more
- Following the guidelines your doctor gave you for when you are ill

4. The Impact of High Blood Sugar and Exercise

You may be concerned about exercising if your blood sugar is high. Most of the time, exercise will help lower your blood sugar. Follow the steps below to make sure you are safe while you exercise when your blood sugar is high.

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1. Do not exercise if you are ill (cold, infection, surgery)
2. Take your diabetes medicines as prescribed
3. Check your blood sugar before you start. If your blood sugar is above 16.7 mmol/L only do light intensity exercise for 15 to 20 minutes then check your blood sugar again
 - If your blood sugar is less than what you started with keep exercising
 - If your blood sugar is higher than what you started with stop exercise for the day. Talk to your doctor or healthcare provider to learn how to lower your high blood sugar
4. Drink water before, during and after exercise unless your doctor has told you to limit your fluids
5. Watch for signs and symptoms of high blood sugar. Stop your exercise if you notice any of the signs or symptoms of high blood sugar
6. Check your blood sugar after exercise

Summary

- High blood sugar means your blood sugar is higher than normal
- Check your blood sugar if you think it is high
- Your blood sugar will likely be higher when you are ill (with a cold, infection or having surgery)
- Do not exercise when you are ill
- Follow the guidelines your doctor gave you to follow when you are ill