



FACT SHEET:

Living well with type 2 diabetes – what to do when you are sick

Like everyone, people living with type 2 diabetes get sick with everyday illnesses such as influenza (flu), a cold, gastro, or other common infections. It is important to be prepared and to know what to do if you get sick. This includes having a personalised **sick day action plan**, and a **sick day kit** ready to use at the earliest sign of illness.

Start following your sick day action plan **immediately** if you feel unwell or have any signs of illness. Contact your doctor early to get medical treatment so you can avoid becoming more unwell and needing emergency care. Understanding how to manage your diabetes when you are sick and having a personalised plan can reduce the risk of developing serious problems.

Sick days and living with type 2 diabetes

You may need changes your usual diabetes management plan to help prevent your blood glucose levels from going too high or too low. These changes are usually only needed until you are well again.

Why is it important to manage sick days ?

Being unwell can make it more challenging to keep glucose levels in your target range. This is because of the stress hormones your body releases when you are sick. Stress hormones increase the amount of glucose the liver releases into the bloodstream. They can make it difficult to keep your blood glucose levels from rising too high.

If you are sick and have high blood glucose levels, you are at risk of severe dehydration. This can make you feel drowsy and confused and needing urgent medical attention.

What do I do when I am sick?

Follow your sick day action plan

Start following your sick day action plan immediately if:

- you feel unwell, **OR**
- your blood glucose levels are higher than 15 mmol/L for 8–12 hours or more.

Make an appointment with your doctor, diabetes nurse practitioner or diabetes educator if you do not have a sick day action plan. They can work with you to develop your personalised sick day action plan.

Let someone know you are unwell

Let a friend or family member know that you are unwell. Tell them about your sick day action plan in case you need any help. If possible, have someone stay with you or check in on you frequently.

Check your blood glucose levels more often

If you usually monitor your blood glucose levels at home, check every 2 hours or more according to your sick day action plan. You can return to your usual monitoring plan when your blood glucose levels are back in your recommended target range.

If you do not usually monitor your blood glucose levels, discuss this with your doctor, diabetes nurse practitioner or diabetes educator when developing your sick day action plan. They may ask you to keep a blood glucose meter at home to use when you are unwell. Your doctor, diabetes nurse practitioner or diabetes educator can show you how to use your meter and access your blood glucose monitoring strips through the NDSS.

Taking your diabetes medications

You might need to stop taking some diabetes medications if you cannot eat or have several episodes of vomiting and/or diarrhoea lasting more than a few hours. If you cannot eat or drink, other medications need to be stopped or have the dose reduced to reduce your risk of hypoglycaemia (also known as hypo or low blood glucose level).

Your sick day action plan tells you which medicine you need to stop taking, which ones you may need to reduce the dose of, and which ones you can continue to take.

Using insulin

If you are using insulin, you may need extra insulin when you are unwell. This can be true even when you are not eating much, or are vomiting or have diarrhoea. Monitor your blood glucose levels often. This will help indicate if you need extra insulin. If you do, it will be an additional dose of rapid-acting or short-acting insulin. Sometimes, blood glucose levels may be low when you are unwell or sick. In this case, a reduction in insulin doses may be needed.

Talk to doctor or diabetes nurse practitioner for advice on making changes to your insulin. Your sick day action plan should tell you how to manage your insulin doses when you are unwell.

If you are unsure about how to manage your insulin doses when you are unwell or have questions about your sick day action plan, please contact your doctor or diabetes educator.

Keep drinking and (if possible) eating

It is very important to keep up your fluid intake. This will reduce your risk of you becoming dehydrated. It is also very important to keep up your carbohydrate (carb) intake when you feel unwell to reduce your risk of a hypo.

- If you cannot eat normally, then have snacks or small meals such as dry toast, plain rice, dry biscuits, crackers mashed potato, plain ice cream or custard. Avoid dairy food if you have gastro or diarrhoea.
- If you are vomiting and/or have diarrhoea, try to have ½-1 cup of fluid (125 - 250 mL) every hour.
- If your blood glucose levels are 15 mmol/L or lower and you cannot eat, drink one cup of fluids (250 mL) containing carbs every hour. These include regular cordial, soft drinks, juice, sports drinks, weak tea with sugar/honey, jelly, or sweet ice blocks.

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- If your blood glucose levels are higher than 15 mmol/L, drink 1 cup of fluids (250 mL), that does not contain carbs, every hour. For example, water, diet cordial, diet soft drinks, weak tea with no sugar/honey, diet jelly or broth.
- If you are vomiting or have diarrhoea, you can replace fluid and electrolytes with drinks such as Hydralyte®.

Ask for help

Seek medical help to treat any illness or infection you may have.

If you are unsure about taking medications or insulin injections when unwell or have questions about a sick day action plan, contact your doctor, diabetes nurse practitioner or diabetes educator.

Contact your doctor early to avoid becoming more unwell and needing emergency care.

Seek medical attention **IMMEDIATELY** if you:

- do not know what to do
- are drowsy or confused
- have deep, rapid breathing or shortness of breath
- have chest pain
- have a foot infection
- cannot keep food or fluids down and are vomiting, have diarrhoea and/or stomach pain lasting more than a few hours
- are showing signs or have symptoms of dehydrations such as extreme thirst, weakness, confusion or not passing urine
- have blood glucose levels that continue to rise even though you have been following your sick day action plan
- cannot keep your blood glucose levels above 4 mmol/L
- are not well enough to follow your sick day action plan or have no one to help you.

Sick day checklist

- Follow your sick day action plan and use your sick day kit.
- Let someone know you are unwell.
- If you usually monitor your blood glucose levels, particularly if you use insulin, check your blood glucose levels more often according to your sick day action plan.
- If you do not usually monitor your blood glucose levels, make sure your sick day action plan explains if and when you should start monitoring when unwell.
- If you inject insulin, you may need to increase your dose(s).
- Keep taking your diabetes medications. But you may also need to stop some medications if you are unable to eat or have several episodes of vomiting and/or diarrhoea or lasting more than a few hours.
- Ask for help-contact your doctor, diabetes nurse practitioner or your diabetes educator.
- Drink plenty of fluids and keep eating if possible.
- Seek urgent medical care if needed.

Stay healthy

- Get immunised for the flu, pneumonia and COVID-19.
- Take care with personal hygiene to avoid the spread of germs.
- Keep your blood glucose levels within your target range to help reduce the risk of illness and infections.

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Sick day kit

The following items should be included in your sick day kit:

- a copy of your sick day action plan
- a blood glucose meter
- in-date blood glucose monitoring strips
- a pen and notebook, your blood glucose diary or smartphone app to record your blood glucose levels
- a thermometer
- pain relief medication
- food and drinks for sick days
- hypo treatment
- rapid - acting or short - acting insulin (if you use insulin)
- insulin pens (if you use insulin) and pen needles or syringes
- telephone numbers for medical and support people
- a list of relevant medical information, for example Medicare number, NDSS number, medical insurance information and notepad and pen to record food/drink intake, medication, and glucose checks.

Check your sick day kit every 3 months to make sure it is up to date and restock your kit if you have used it.



More information and support

- Go to [ndss.com.au](https://www.ndss.com.au) to access the Carb Counting program online and other NDSS programs and services in your state or territory, or online.
- Go to [ndss.com.au](https://www.ndss.com.au) and search for the 'Insulin' and 'Carbohydrate counting', 'Managing hypoglycaemia', 'Blood glucose monitoring' and other fact sheets.
- Call the NDSS Helpline on **1800 637 700** and ask to speak to a diabetes educator or go to [adea.com.au](https://www.adea.com.au) to find a diabetes educator.
- Go to [healthdirect.gov.au](https://www.healthdirect.gov.au) to find diabetes health professionals near you.
- For more information, go to [adea.com.au](https://www.adea.com.au) and download a copy of the Australian Diabetes Educators Association guide to managing sick days for adults living with type 2 diabetes, and a sample sick day action plan that you can complete with your doctor, diabetes nurse practitioner or diabetes educator. There are separate guides and sick day action plans for people with type 2 diabetes who use insulin and those who do not.



