

DIABETES CONTROL MATTERS

WHAT IS DIABETIC KETOACIDOSIS?

Diabetic Ketoacidosis (DKA) is a long scientific term that you probably never really wanted to understand. But it is a dangerous health condition and is completely preventable. If you have Type 1 diabetes, high blood glucose can lead to DKA (It is rarely a problem for Type 2 diabetes).

When the body cannot use sugar for energy because of a lack of insulin, the body breaks down fat for energy and ketones are made. Ketones are the acids or toxins produced when blood glucose rises in the absence of insulin. Large amounts of ketones in the blood cause the life-threatening problem called diabetic ketoacidosis. When high levels of ketones are in the blood, the ketones spill into the urine, just as sugar does. Your whole body becomes too acid: in other words, you have acidosis. Common causes of DKA include: illness, infection, "bad" insulin, and/or missed doses of insulin.

Unfortunately, the most common cause of DKA is the mistaken impression that when you are sick and not eating, you should stop taking your insulin. Illness actually increases your need for insulin, and omitting insulin during the stress of an illness can very easily and quickly lead to DKA.



Symptoms of DKA

- Increased thirst & urination
- Nausea, vomiting, and/or stomach pain
- Changes in or difficulty breathing
- Acid or fruity smell on breath
- Flushing
- Dehydration
- Passing out
- Fatigue

How Can You Prevent DKA?

- ✓ Follow sick day guidelines.
- ✓ Never stop taking your usual insulin dose.
- ✓ Test blood glucose every 2 – 4 hours.
- ✓ If you do not have a plan to take extra insulin, call your physician if you have 2 unexplained blood sugars in a row of over 240 mg/dl.
- ✓ If your blood glucose is over 240, check your urine for ketones.
- ✓ If ketones are present, call your physician right away.
- ✓ Avoid exercise until ketones disappear or your blood sugar is less than 300 mg/dl.
- ✓ It is important to increase fluid intake – drink sugar-free, caffeine-free fluids such as water, diet soda, broth or tea.
- ✓ If persistent vomiting, inability to tolerate fluids by mouth, or persistent diarrhea with progressive weakness is present, call your doctor immediately.

How Is DKA Treated?

DKA is usually treated under medical supervision in the hospital. Treatment includes:

- ✓ Insulin
- ✓ Fluids
- ✓ Correction of acidosis (especially potassium)
- ✓ Usually an IV is started
- ✓ Careful monitoring
- ✓ Treatment of the cause