

Diabetes: Monitoring Your Blood Sugar Level

Why do I need to monitor my blood sugar level?

Monitoring your blood sugar level (also called glucose) can help you take better care of your diabetes. Checking your blood sugar will help you learn how food, activity levels, stress, medicine and insulin change your blood sugar level. This information will help you stay healthy and prevent or delay diabetic complications such as blindness and kidney failure. This handout will give you some tips on monitoring your blood sugar level.

How do I measure my blood sugar level?

Follow your doctor's advice and the directions that come with the test strips (and the glucose meter, if you're using one). In general, you will follow the steps below. Check with your doctor for advice specifically for you.

1. Get out a test strip.
2. Use an alcohol pad to clean the finger that you're going to prick.
3. Prick your fingertip with a sterile lancet to get a drop of blood. (It may be easier and less painful to prick your fingertip on one side, not on the pad.)
4. Place the drop of blood on the test strip. Wait the time specified for the kind of strip you are using.
5. When the strip changes color, compare it to the color chart on the box or bottle that the strips came in. This will give you a number for your blood sugar level. (If you are using a glucose meter, skip this step.)
6. If you are using a glucose meter, put the strip in the meter. The meter will give you a number for your blood sugar level.

What if I can't get a drop of blood?

Try washing your hands in hot water to get the blood flowing. Then dangle your hand below your heart for a minute. Prick your finger quickly and then put your hand back down below your heart. You might also try slowly squeezing the finger from the base to the tip.

What supplies do I need?

You will need alcohol pads, sterile finger lancets and test strips. You may also want to get a glucose meter. You can buy these supplies at a drug store. Check with your health insurance plan to see if they will pay for these supplies.

What kinds of glucose meters are available?

There are several brands of glucose meters. Ask your doctor which ones he or she recommends. Shop around and compare costs. If you want to pay a little more

money, you can get a monitor that stores the results in its memory, which allows you to compare results from several days at one time. Other monitors can be hooked up to your computer to analyze your results.

How can I learn more?

For more information, talk to your family doctor. You can also call the American Diabetes Association at 800-342-2383, or visit their Web site at www.diabetes.org.

What do I do with the results?

Write down the results in a record book (see sample below). You can use a small notebook or ask your doctor for a blood testing record book. You may also want to keep track of what you have eaten, when you took medicine or insulin, and how active you have been during the day. This will help you see how these things affect your blood sugar. Talk with your doctor about what is a good range for your blood sugar level and what to do if your blood sugar is not within that range.

How often should I measure my blood sugar level?

It is important to monitor your blood sugar on a regular basis. Ask your doctor how often you should check your blood sugar level and at what time of day. Many people start by checking their blood sugar 2 times a day: before breakfast and before supper. After a few weeks, some people are able to measure their blood sugar level only 2 or 3 times a week.

This handout was developed by the American Academy of Family Physicians in cooperation with the American Diabetes Association.

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This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.

Visit familydoctor.org for information on this and many other health-related topics.

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