

# Diabetes: High Blood Sugar

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## High Blood Sugar

Although people usually think about the long-term complications when it comes to diabetes, short-term or acute problems can also occur. Both low blood sugar levels (hypoglycemia) and high blood sugar levels (hyperglycemia) are acute problems.

Although most people have heard about low blood sugar levels and may be worried it will happen to them, high blood sugar levels are also serious. Over time, these greatly increase the risk for the long-term complications of diabetes.

## What is high blood sugar?

In general, a blood sugar reading of more than 180 mg/dL or any reading above your target range is too high. A blood sugar reading of 300 mg/dL or more can be dangerous. If you have 2 readings in a row of 300 or more, call your provider.

## What causes high blood sugar?

Anything that can raise your blood sugar can cause it to go too high. Not having the right dose or kind of diabetes medicine, being ill or stressed, forgetting to take your diabetes pills or insulin, doing less exercise than usual, or eating more carbohydrates than usual are all things that can cause your blood sugar to go too high. Although it is frustrating, blood sugar levels can also be too high for no clear reason. Sometimes these high levels may be the first sign of an infection, illness or stress.

Because blood sugar levels can go very high when you are ill, talk with your health care team about creating a 'sick day plan' to manage your diabetes when you have a cold, flu or other illness.

### **How will I feel when my blood sugar is too high?**

At times you might not notice any symptoms of high blood sugar. Other times, you may feel the way you did when you first had diabetes. You may:

- feel weak and tired
- have blurred vision
- have a dry mouth
- be thirsty
- feel nauseated and vomit
- go to the bathroom more often

If you have any of these symptoms, check your blood sugar level to see if that is the problem. If your blood sugar levels are high for several days, you may also feel hungry, nauseated or dizzy when you stand. If your blood sugar keeps going higher, other people may notice that you act confused. This is an emergency, and you need to go to the hospital right away. If you aren't treated, you can go into a coma.

### **How can I treat hyperglycemia?**

Drink plenty of water or sugar-free fluid to help "flush" the sugar from your bloodstream. Think about why your blood sugar is high and if it could have been prevented. Very often, blood sugar levels are high when you are not on your usual schedule, feeling stressed or ill, or not using your meal plan or exercising as faithfully. Once you go back to your usual routine, your blood sugar levels go back into your target range.

If you notice that your blood sugar readings are high for several days in a row, or at a certain time of the day, call your health care provider to see if your treatment can be adjusted or to make an appointment for a visit.

If your blood sugar readings are above your target range for more than one week or if you are feeling the symptoms of high blood sugar, call your provider to see if your treatment needs to be changed. If your blood sugar is going higher and higher over several days, you also need to call your provider.

**Ask your doctor, nurse or dietitian the following questions:**

1. What is the target range for my blood sugar readings?
2. What should I do when my blood sugar readings are too high?
3. When should I call you about high blood sugar levels?
4. Can you help me to make a sick day plan?

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