

The flu, pneumonia, and diabetes:

special concerns, simple care

Nearly every person with diabetes should get a flu shot every year. Here's why:

Being vaccinated makes it far less likely that you will catch the flu.

If you do catch the flu, it will probably be much milder and less dangerous than without being vaccinated.

High blood sugar changes the way your body deals with many everyday things. One important change is that you are less able to fight off illness. Even a minor “bug” that a healthy person could recover from within days can cause serious problems for you.

Why should I be extra careful to avoid the flu and pneumonia?

People with diabetes who get the flu or pneumonia have a 3-times higher risk of dying from it. Every year in the United States, as many as 30,000 people with diabetes die from flu or pneumonia.

Being sick also can make it harder to control your blood sugar. Sometimes, if you become very sick, your blood sugar could get high enough to cause coma.

For these reasons, it is very important for you to try to avoid getting sick. If you do get sick, you need to take special care of yourself.

How can I protect myself?

You should talk to your healthcare provider about whether the flu shot is right for you and, if so, when is the right time to get it. This may protect you during the time of year when you would be most likely to catch the flu. Since the vaccine changes every year to fight off the types of flu expected that season, your healthcare provider may recommend that you get a new shot every year to be protected.

You should also talk to your healthcare provider about ways to avoid pneumonia.





Call your healthcare provider right away if...

Your chest hurts.

You have been vomiting for more than 2 hours.

Your urine ketones are high.

You are having trouble breathing.

Your breath smells fruity.

Your lips or tongue are dry and cracked.

These all can be signs of serious conditions like dehydration or diabetic ketoacidosis.

What if I do get sick?

Drinking plenty of fluids may help you feel better and get well sooner. If you can, you should try to eat your normal diet. If you are having trouble keeping your food or medicine down, call your healthcare provider.

Preparing for illness before you become sick is the best thing you can do. Keep foods like saltines, graham crackers, and clear broth in your pantry. This will help you get the carbohydrates and fluid you need.

Ask your healthcare provider about:

- **Symptoms to watch for—**
Be aware of symptoms that require a call to your healthcare provider.



- **How often you should check your blood sugar and urine ketones—**
Because illness can raise your blood sugar, you will probably need to check it more often than usual.

Illness can also increase your ketones. These are acids that can build up in your blood when your body does not have enough insulin. When your ketones are high, it means that your body is having trouble getting enough energy from blood sugar. This can be dangerous.

- **Changes to your medication when you are sick**
- **Over-the-counter drugs or vitamins** you would like to take to help you feel better; some of these drugs contain sugar or can raise your blood sugar in other ways.

If you are very sick, you may need to go to the emergency room or see healthcare professionals who do not know you. Be sure to tell them that you have diabetes (type 1 or type 2). You should also tell them about any prescription or over-the-counter drugs or vitamins you take.

Ask your healthcare provider about other ways to avoid flu and pneumonia. Be sure to have a plan in place in case you do get sick. Your healthy future depends on it!

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