

Your Care at Home: Checking Blood Sugar

Narrator

If you've been told you need to check your blood sugar, it's because having levels that are either too high or too low can be dangerous. And checking your blood sugar is really not that hard, painful, or scary. In the next few minutes my friend and I will teach you why and how to check your blood sugar, and the reading levels you should know.

It's especially important to know if your blood sugar is in a safe range after you eat or exercise, or if you're sick. Talk to your doctor or nurse about what your target blood sugar should be. Generally speaking, your blood sugar should be between 80 and 130 if you have not had anything to eat or drink, except water, for four hours or more. If you have eaten within the last 2 hours, that reading should be below 180.

Before checking your blood sugar read the instructions that came with your meter. This will tell you how to set the time and date on the meter and how to set it up for your first use. Make sure these are correct before each test. The user guide also will tell you how to prepare your meter each time you open a new package of strips, if this is necessary. It will also tell you how and when you might need to use a control solution. This solution helps you know that your numbers are as accurate as possible.

To get started, wash your hands well with soap and water and dry them well. No need to use an alcohol swab unless you can't wash your hands. You may also use hand sanitizer. Food, lotion, and other residues on your hands can make your blood sugar test high when it isn't, so clean hands are important. You don't need to wear gloves to check your own blood sugar, but if someone else is helping you, they should wear gloves. You'll need:

- A meter to read your blood sugar
- A blood glucose strip which is chemically treated to read your blood sample
- A lancing device to draw blood and the lancet, or small needle that fits into it
- Tissue, and
- A hard plastic sharps container for safely disposing of your lancet

First, take the cap off your lancing device and insert a lancet into it. Twist the protective cover off the lancet and replace the cap on the lancing device. There may be numbers on your device to set the pressure based on how thick your skin is. Start with a middle number. If you can't get blood, go to a higher number. If you get too much blood, lower the number.

Next, make sure your strips are not outdated. If they're past their expiration date, throw that bottle of strips away, and use a new one. Take out one strip and close the bottle immediately so that the other strips are not affected by temperature, light or humidity. Insert your strip into the meter. You should see a picture of a blood drop on the screen. To get a drop of blood, firmly press your lancing device on the side of your finger and press the release button. While some meters' instructions might say you can use another part of your body to get blood, using your finger is recommended. It's the most accurate, especially if you think your blood sugar may be low.

Now gently squeeze your finger to get a drop of blood. Then touch the blood glucose strip to your drop of blood. Different strips and meters work differently, so make sure you know how yours operates. Your blood sugar number will appear in the view window on your meter. Knowing what your target is will help you know if it's too high or too low. If your blood sugar number seems low or high, but you don't feel that way, repeat the test with a new strip to double check it.

Your diabetes care team will teach you what to do to bring a high number down and a low number up. A low blood sugar, called hypoglycemia, should be treated right away. Take glucose tablets or gel or some other fast acting carbohydrate like a half glass of orange juice or regular soda pop. If your blood sugar tests high or low and doesn't respond to treatment, call your doctor or nurse.

When you're done taking your blood sugar reading, you can hold a tissue on your finger to stop any bleeding. Then remove the strip and throw it away. Discard the lancet in a safe sharps container. Finish by washing your hands thoroughly.

Most meters will automatically store the most recent numbers, but you should also record them. Many meters will let you download the readings directly to your computer, but writing them down in a notebook is fine, too. Make sure you include any details about food, exercise, medicine that lowers your blood sugar, stress, or other things that might have affected your reading. For example, if your blood sugar is high, it might be because you ate out, or you forgot your medicine. It's hard to remember these details weeks later when you see your doctor.

Just a couple of other things:

- Bring your meter with you to all of your doctor appointments.
- Your doctor or nurse might want to watch you check your blood sugar and give you some pointers.
- And if you have any questions about using your meter, there should be a toll free number on the meter or in the package. Give it a call.