

Diabetes: Blood Sugar Tests

Knowing your blood sugar—or glucose—levels is one of the ways you can help manage your diabetes. That's because blood sugar levels can help you know how you're doing. There are two tools you can use to read your blood sugar: a finger-stick test and a continuous glucose monitor, or "CGM."

A finger-stick test uses a meter, lancets, lancet holder, and test strips. The results will show within a few seconds on the meter. There are two types of CGMs. They each have a sensor that attaches to your body. The results show either on a phone app or on the CGM's receiver.

When you have a CGM, sometimes you may still need to use a finger-stick test to confirm your levels so you can make decisions about activity, food, or insulin. Whether you use a finger-stick test or CGM—or both, it's like you're taking a snapshot of the amount of sugar in your blood in real time.

So if you ate a meal with a lot of carbohydrates, you'll know how much the food raised your blood sugar. And how much a short walk or other activity can bring it back down. Testing your blood sugar also helps you know when it's too low, which can happen after activity.

When you have diabetes, knowing your blood sugar levels is one of the main ways you can learn how well you're treating it. When high blood sugar is not treated, it can cause problems in other parts of your body, including your eyes, nerves, heart, and kidneys.

And having low blood sugar can be dangerous too. If it's not treated, it also can lead to serious problems. Testing your blood sugar and recognizing symptoms like drowsiness, confusion, and a headache can help you take action to bring your blood sugar back up.

That's why your doctor will want to know the highs and any lows you experience. And there's another blood test, called the A1C test, that your doctor will give you.

It's different than other tests, because it shows your average blood sugar level over the past 2 to 3 months. And those results show how well your treatment plan is working.

You may need to see your doctor for an A1c test at least twice a year or more often depending on how you're doing. Finger-stick tests and CGMs may seem like a lot to manage and think about every day, but these tools and technology give you the information you need to help you take care of yourself when you have diabetes.