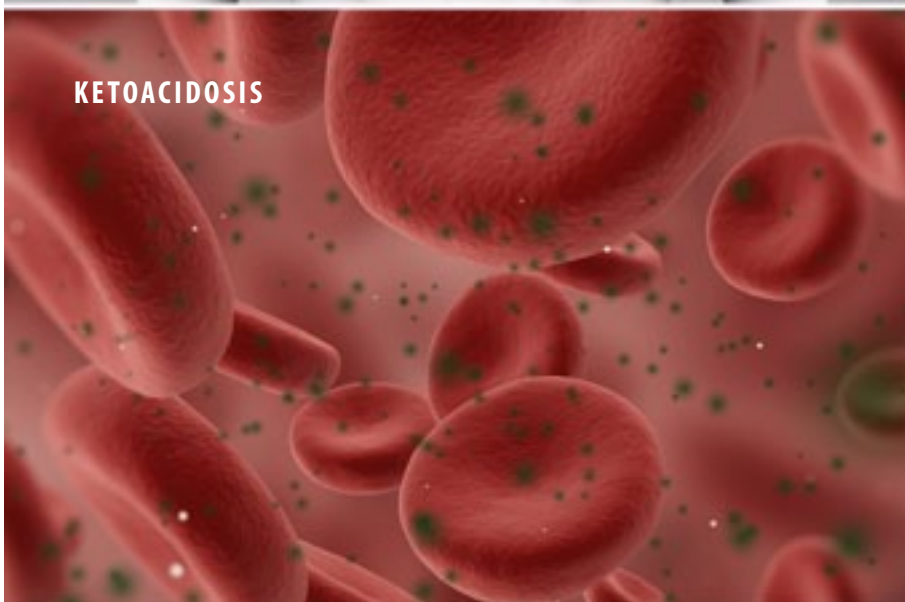


Diabetic Ketoacidosis (DKA)



Overview

This condition, a complication of diabetes, is a buildup of toxins in the blood. It is a medical emergency that can be life-threatening.

How it Occurs

Glucose can't enter cells without help from a hormone called insulin. In people who have diabetes, the process of using insulin to turn blood glucose (also called blood sugar) into energy does not work properly. If the body does not have the insulin it needs, it cannot use blood glucose for energy. The body releases hormones that begin breaking down stored fat for energy. This process creates acids called ketones. They can build up to toxic levels in the blood and urine. They begin to poison the body. When the ketone level gets high enough, the person has ketoacidosis.

Triggers

This condition can be caused by not getting enough insulin medication. It can also be triggered by not eating enough, and by illness, injury, stress, or alcohol or drug abuse.

Early Symptoms

Early symptoms of ketoacidosis include increased thirst and frequent urination. A blood glucose test will show a high glucose level. A ketone test of the blood or urine will show a high ketone level.

Advanced Symptoms

As the condition gets worse, other symptoms appear. These include abdominal pain, nausea and vomiting. The person may feel weak, tired and confused. The person may have shortness of breath, and the breath may smell fruity.

Treatment

A person who is experiencing ketoacidosis may be treated in an emergency room with fluids and with insulin therapy. Whatever triggered the episode may also require treatment. Without medical care, ketoacidosis can lead to diabetic coma. It can be fatal.