

# My Diabetes and Me

A patient-friendly booklet  
for: \_\_\_\_\_





© Copyright 6 December 2016, Sept 2010, Second edition.  
McGill University Health Centre. This document is copyrighted.  
Reproduction in whole or in part without express written permission from  
patienteducation@muhc.mcgill.ca is strictly prohibited.

We would like to thank the MUHC Patient Education Office for their support throughout the development of this material, including the writing, the design, layout, as well as for the creation of all the images.

*“ I think that a good symbol to represent DIABETES is a TREE! The more you invest in it’s roots the stronger the branches will be and the more beautiful the tree will be. Just like diabetes, if you take proper care, you can have a beautiful, fulfilling life just like everyone else... that’s just my idea. Plus the tree points to the sky and the sky is the limit! ”*

*By A.A., 21-year-old person with type 1 diabetes, 2009*



### **IMPORTANT : PLEASE READ**

Information provided in this pamphlet is for educational purposes.  
It is not intended to replace the advice or instruction of a professional healthcare practitioner, or to substitute medical care.  
Contact a qualified healthcare practitioner if you have any questions concerning your care.



This material is also available through the  
MUHC Patient Education Office website  
[www.muhcpatienteducation.ca](http://www.muhcpatienteducation.ca)

## WHAT I need to know about DIABETES

- Why should I check my **BLOOD SUGAR**?
- What should I **EAT**?
- Why should I **EXERCISE**?
- What are the symptoms of **HIGH BLOOD SUGAR**  
*Hyperglycemia?*
- What are the symptoms of **LOW BLOOD SUGAR**  
*Hypoglycemia?*
- What should I do when I am feeling **SICK**?
- Why should I take care of my **FEET** and **EYES**?
- Why should I take care of my **KIDNEYS** ?
- What do I need to know about **diabetes pills** and **INSULIN**.

### *A few facts*

More than two million Canadians have diabetes.

The good news: studies have shown that simple lifestyle changes will help control type 2 diabetes.

Why should I take care of my diabetes?

✦ So that I can feel better

✦ So that I can have less complications

✦ So that I can live a longer healthier life

## WHAT I need to know about DIABETES

**D**iabetes is a lifelong condition that you can control. Your body cannot properly store and use sugar (glucose) for energy.

The fuel that your body needs is called glucose. Glucose comes from foods such as breads, cereals, pasta, rice, potatoes, fruits and some vegetables.

To use glucose, your body needs insulin. Insulin is made in the pancreas. Over time your pancreas becomes tired and can't produce enough insulin.

*There are different types of Diabetes:*

- Diabetes type 1
- Diabetes type 2
- Other types



**Which type of diabetes do you have?**

---

## WHY should I check my blood sugar?

### Regular blood sugar testing will help you:

- ★ Understand how food, exercise and illness can affect your blood sugar
- ★ Keep your blood sugar under control
- ★ Prevent other health problems

### Steps for checking my blood sugar:

1. Ask your doctor :
  - **How many times** a day and night you should check your blood sugar
  - **When** you should check your blood sugar (that is, before or after meals and bedtime)
2. Record the date, time and blood sugar result for each check.
3. Show your results to your doctor and/or nurse at each visit.

*Writing down your results helps you find patterns, such as, when your blood sugar is unusually high or low.*

### RECOMMENDED BLOOD SUGAR TARGETS

*	Blood sugar before meals (mmol/l)	Blood sugar 2 hours after eating (mmol/l)
Targets for most people with diabetes	<b>4.0 to 7.0</b>	<b>5.0 to 10.0</b>

\* Canadian Diabetes Association Guidelines

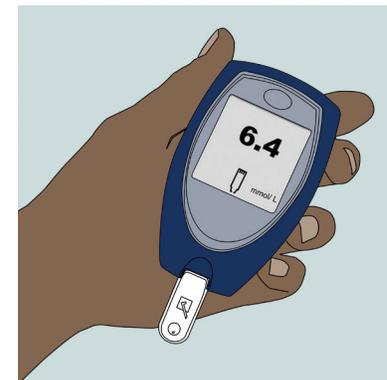
✓ Check with your doctor what is your sugar target.

 My sugar target should be:  
\_\_\_\_\_

### WHEN do I call my doctor?

You should call your diabetes specialist (endocrinologist) or family doctor:

If your blood sugar is over 18 mmol/l with or without \*ketones over 6 to 8 hours **and** you are feeling sick.



### When do I go to the Emergency?

If blood sugar is over 18 mmol/l with or without \*ketones over 6 to 8 hours **and** you are feeling sick **and** you cannot reach your diabetes specialist (endocrinologist) or family doctor.



**\*Ketones:** when your sugar is very high and you are not getting enough insulin, your body is trying to get food from your fat cells. Fat cells break down and release ketones.

## WHAT should I eat?

- Eat 3 balanced meals a day and allow 4-6 hours between meals.
- At each meal include foods from 3 of the 4 food groups:

Have you seen a nutritionist?

### ★ Starch foods

*(whole grain breads and cereals, pasta, rice, potatoes)*

### ★ Milk / Milk products

*(low fat milk- skim, 1%, 2% and low fat dairy products)*

### ★ Vegetables & Fruit

*(fresh, frozen, canned)*

### ★ Protein Foods

*(lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs and vegetarian protein like tofu and legumes)*

- Limit fat intake from foods like gravies, fried foods, fatty meats and “regular” milk products.
- Make sure you meet with a nutritionist

## WHY Should I exercise ?



### Exercise is important for diabetic patients because exercise:

- Makes you feel better
- Keeps blood sugar under control
- Makes your insulin work better
- Helps you loose extra weight

*Simple exercise like walking 30 minutes a day is very good.*

*It is important to speak with your doctor before you start any exercise program.*

# WHAT are the symptoms of HIGH BLOOD SUGAR? (also known as Hyperglycemia)

You may feel:



Dry mouth and very thirsty



Unusual drowsiness or extreme tiredness



Urge to urinate often

Check (✓) the symptoms that you recognize that you have experienced.

# WHAT can make my blood sugar go HIGH?

- Eating more than usual
- Forgetting medication for diabetes
- Under more stress than usual
- Feeling sick
- Testing sugar less than 1 hour after a meal

## WHEN do I call my doctor?

*You should call your diabetes specialist (endocrinologist) or family doctor:*

If your blood sugar is over 18 mmol/l with or without \*ketones over 6 to 8 hours **and** you are feeling sick.

## WHEN do I go to the Emergency?

If blood sugar is over 18 mmol/l with or without \*ketones over 6 to 8 hours **and** you are feeling sick **and** you cannot reach your diabetes specialist (endocrinologist) or family doctor

\* Ketones – see explanation on page 5

# WHAT are the symptoms of LOW blood sugar?

(also known as *HYPOGLYCEMIA*)



Shaky, light-headed



Nervous, irritable  
anxious



Palpitations



Sweating



Confused,  
unable to  
concentrate



Weak and  
drowsy



Trouble  
speaking



Trouble  
seeing



Hungry



Headache



Nauseated

Check (✓) the symptoms that you recognize that you have experienced.

## WHAT should I do if I have LOW blood sugar?

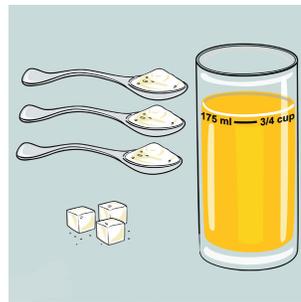
### Follow these steps:

1. Check blood sugar first.
  2. If sugar is less than 4 mmol/l take 15 grams of fast-acting carbohydrate (sugar) such as:
    - 15 grams of glucose in the form of glucose tablets. (Check with your pharmacist).
- OR**
- $\frac{3}{4}$  of a cup of unsweetened juice or regular soft drink
- OR**
- 3 teaspoons of sugar in a glass of water
3. WAIT 15 minutes and check blood sugar again

4. If blood sugar is still less than 4 mmol/l take another 15 grams of carbohydrate and wait another 15 minutes. Keep repeating STEPS 1 to 3 until your sugar goes to 4 mmol/l.

5. Contact your Doctor if you had a severe low blood sugar that required help from someone to treat you.

6. Contact your Doctor if you have had a number of low blood sugar and do not know how to avoid them.



### After step 4:

- If it is time for your meal, have your usual meal.
- If your meal is more than 1 hour away, then take a carbohydrate and protein snack such as  $\frac{1}{2}$  a sandwich or 4 crackers and 1 ounce of cheese.

## WHAT should I do when I am feeling SICK?

### Follow these steps when sick:

1. Take your diabetes pills and/or insulin.
2. Check your blood sugar every 3-4 hours, write down your results.
3. If you take insulin you should test your urine or blood for ketones\* every 3-4 hours.

If your blood sugar results are over 18 mmol/l with or without ketones over 6 to 8 hours, **and** you are feeling sick, you should contact your diabetes specialist (endocrinologist) or family doctor.

4. If you are able to eat your meals, drink plenty of extra water and sugar-free liquids, avoid coffee or tea.
5. If you are unable to eat, take 15 grams of carbohydrate every hour. Examples of 15 grams of carbohydrate are:
  - 1/2 c of regular jello
  - 6 oz regular ginger ale
6. Check your temperature and rest.

Your blood sugar can go up when you have a fever, flu, infection, or surgery.

Your sugar can go up even if you don't eat. Insulin is not working as well and your liver will make more sugar, in an attempt to feed you.

\* Ketones: see explanation on page 5

## WHY should I take care of my FEET?

- Diabetics may have less feeling in their feet.
- Check your feet daily. Call your doctor if you have a cut or blisters or painful ingrown toenails.
- Never walk barefoot.
- Wear cotton or wool socks (preferably white).
- Wear properly fitting shoes.
- If you cannot see well, do not cut your own toenails. Ask your doctor or nurse for advice.
- Dry the skin between you toes, especially after bathing or swimming.
- Apply cream to your feet daily to keep your skin soft. Do not apply cream between your toes.
- Make sure your doctor or nurse checks your feet at each visit.

## WHY should I take care of my EYES?

Diabetes can damage your eyes, causing loss of vision or blindness.

This is called **RETINOPATHY**.

### *You can prevent damage to your eyes:*

- Make sure you keep blood sugar within your target so that you can lower your risk of loss of eyesight.
- Make sure your blood pressure and cholesterol are controlled by taking your medications as prescribed.
- Have your eyes checked regularly for any changes. Your doctor should refer you to an eye specialist.



**My last eye doctor's appointment was:**

---

# Why should I take care of my kidneys ?

Some people with diabetes may develop long-term kidney disease.

Diabetes can cause damage to the small blood vessels in your kidneys. When this happens your kidneys are no longer able to properly clean your blood.

A complication that may occur is difficulty in emptying your bladder. This can cause increased pressure and increased risk of urine infections.

## Signs & symptoms of kidney damage include:

- Weight gain and swelling of the feet.
- High blood pressure.
- Frequently passing urine at night.

## How do I protect my kidneys?

- Keep your blood sugar under control.
- Keep your blood pressure under control by taking your medications as prescribed.

🌟 *Your doctor will check how your kidneys work by testing your blood and urine.*

# What I need to know about diabetes pills and insulin .

## Diabetes Pills

- 🌟 Diabetes pills are not insulin.

### Some diabetes pills:

- Will help your pancreas make more insulin.
- Will help the liver release less sugar and make your insulin work better.
- You may need more than one different type of diabetes pills to help control your blood sugar.
- Check with your nurse, doctor or pharmacist about the dose and time you should be taking your pills.
- If you are considering taking any over the counter medications, or any herbal products or supplements, speak with your doctor or pharmacist first.



**My diabetes pills are:**

---

---

---

# Insulins

- There are different types of insulins, Your doctor will help choose the right one for you.



**Insulins  
I will  
take are:**

---

---

---

---

*People with type 1 diabetes need to take insulin every day of their life.*

*People with type 2 diabetes often need insulin to help control their diabetes. Taking insulin is normal after many years of having diabetes. It does not mean you have failed.*

- Some people may need to take insulin and diabetes pills to control their diabetes.
- Some insulins work very quickly and are injected just before meals.
- Some insulins work very slowly and may need to be taken before breakfast and/or at bedtime.
- Check with your nurse, doctor or pharmacist for the names, dose and times to inject your insulins



**Who to reach in case of emergency:**

---

📞 **Telephone number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**The doctor looking after my diabetes is:**

---

📞 **Telephone number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**The nurse looking after my diabetes is:**

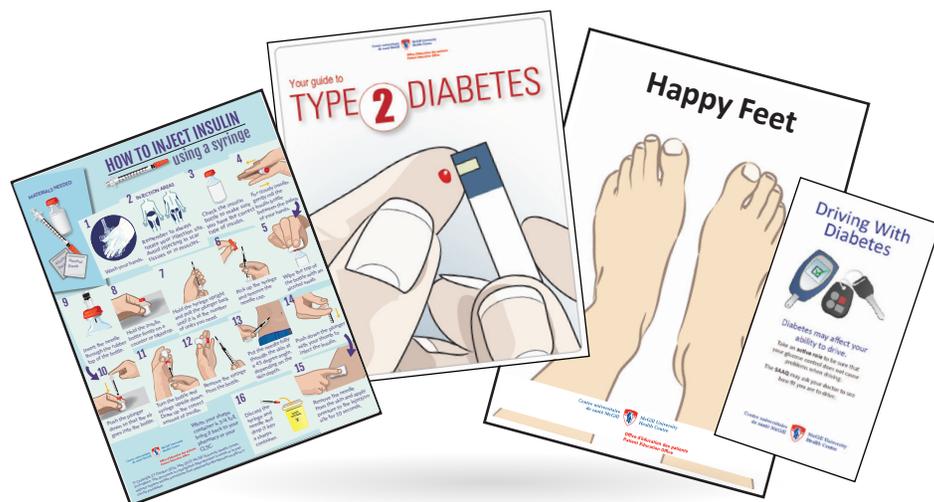
---

📞 **Telephone number:** \_\_\_\_\_



Looking for more information on

# DIABETES ?



Visit the Patient Education Collection

Search: **Diabetes in adults**

[muhc.patienteducation.ca](http://muhc.patienteducation.ca)



Office d'éducation des patients  
Patient Education Office

