Developed and fully funded by AstraZeneca. This material is for people diagnosed with type 2 diabetes.
It is not intended to replace discussions between you and your healthcare professional.

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How to manage your type 2 diabetes during an illness

If you have type 2 diabetes and are ill, this material can help guide you on how to manage this. Talk to your doctor, pharmacist or nurse if you have any questions or worries. They are there to support you in your care with type 2 diabetes.

How illness affects type 2 diabetes

Having an illness can raise your blood sugar levels. When you are ill, the body's natural defence system tries to fight this off. As part of this defence, more sugar is released into the blood. This can make blood sugar levels rise. It can happen even if you are eating less than usual.[1] Common symptoms of high blood sugar levels include:[2]

Feeling very thirsty | **Peeing a lot** | **Feeling weak or tired** | **Blurry vision** | **Losing weight**

Feeling or being sick, or having diarrhoea can also make your blood sugar levels drop. This happens as your body is not absorbing food as usual.[1]
Remember, there are ways to help you manage your type 2 diabetes during an illness. This guidance is sometimes known as 'Sick day' rules.[3]

If you are ill, you may need to pause or stop taking certain diabetes medications (learn more about these medications in the next section).[4]

This is because some illnesses can lead to dehydration, the loss of fluid from your body.[1]

Talk to your doctor, pharmacist or nurse for medical advice if you have one or more of the illnesses listed below:[3]

- Common cold
- Influenza
- Diarrhoea or vomiting
- Pneumonia (inflammation of the lungs)
- Infections e.g. chest infection or urinary tract infection
- Abscess (a painful, swollen area that contains pus)
- An injury, such as a fracture

There may be other illnesses not listed here that you may need to stop taking your medications for if you're ill. Talk to your doctor, pharmacist or nurse if you have any worries or questions.

Please see the next page for advice on how to manage your medications during an illness.

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Managing medications during an illness

If you are ill, you may need to pause or stop taking certain diabetes medications such as:[4]

- **Metformin**
- **Sulfonylureas**
- **SGLT2 inhibitors**
- **GLP-1 analogues**

Ask your doctor, pharmacist or nurse before pausing or stopping any medication.

This is not a full list of medications. You may be taking other medications that need to be paused. See appropriate patient information leaflets or speak to your doctor, pharmacist or nurse for more information about taking your medications when you are ill.

Once you are feeling better and have been eating and drinking normally over the past 24–48 hours, you should start taking your medications again, unless your doctor, pharmacist or nurse tells you otherwise.[4]

Remember to get medical help from your doctor, pharmacist or nurse if you feel very ill, you are not feeling better or if you are not sure what to do.

Looking after yourself

Here are some ways to help you manage your type 2 diabetes during an illness:[1,5]

Try to rest more and avoid doing any difficult exercises

Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of unsweetened drinks and eat little and often

Check your blood sugar levels at least every 4 hours, or as advised by your healthcare team

Talk to your healthcare team to check if you need to adjust your diabetes medication when you are ill. There are some medications that you should not take as much of or you should stop taking

Insulin doses may need to change when you're ill. Talk to your healthcare team for more advice on how to manage this

Talk to your healthcare team if you think you have an infection. You may need antibiotics for this

Treat symptoms such as a high temperature or a cough with basic over-the-counter medicines. These can be things such as painkillers and cough syrups. These do not have to be sugar free, as they contain very little sugar and are taken in small amounts. Ask your pharmacist for advice

Keep eating or drinking. If you can't keep food down try eating little and often. Try snacks or drinks that can give you energy. Try to sip sugary drinks. If you're still not able to keep any fluids down get medical help as soon as possible

Talk to your healthcare team if you have any questions about managing your diabetes when you are ill.

Abbreviations

GLP-1=glucagon-like peptide-1; SGLT2 inhibitors=sodium-glucose co-transporter-2 inhibitors.

References

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