

# THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT DIABETIC KETOACIDOSIS

## What is diabetic ketoacidosis?

- Insulin helps the sugar in your bloodstream go into cells, where it is used for energy.
- Diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA) happens when your blood sugar (glucose) goes up too high because you are low on insulin. A high blood sugar can make you pass a lot of urine, which leads to dehydration.
- In DKA, the body burns fat, which increases a toxic acid (called ketones) in the blood.
- DKA happens mostly in children or adults with type 1 diabetes, but people (mostly adults) with type 2 diabetes or with diabetes during pregnancy can also get DKA.
- DKA is usually brought on by an illness, such as pneumonia, or by missing doses of diabetes medication.
- DKA is sometimes the first sign of having diabetes but can be prevented if you can recognize the signs of getting diabetes or DKA.



- Treatment is giving you fluids by vein, giving medication to lower your blood sugar, and correcting problems with the salt and potassium in your body.

## How does a person know that they might have DKA?

- The clues to getting DKA are feeling thirsty all the time, urinating a lot, and feeling very tired or sleepy.
- Blood sugars over 250 mg/dL can be a sign of DKA as well as finding an acid (ketones) on a home blood or urine test.

## How is DKA treated?

- DKA is successfully treated more than 95% of the time, but if untreated, can lead to coma and even death. People with DKA are usually hospitalized.

## Is DKA preventable?

- Your doctor should make a plan for when you are sick (called a Sick Day Plan) to help keep you from getting DKA.
- On sick days, you make frequent blood sugar checks and take extra insulin depending on the sugar level as well as do home tests of urine or blood ketones. You drink extra fluid and eat specific foods.
- Call your doctor if your blood sugar stays over 240 mg/dL even though you have been following your sick day plan.

## For More Information

### Web Sites With Good Information About DKA

[www.diabetes.org/type-1-diabetes/ketoacidosis.jsp](http://www.diabetes.org/type-1-diabetes/ketoacidosis.jsp)  
American Diabetes Association

<http://diabetes.niddk.nih.gov/dm/pubs/type1and2/specialtimes.htm#sick>  
National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse

[www.aafp.org/afp/20050501/1721ph.html](http://www.aafp.org/afp/20050501/1721ph.html)  
American Academy of Family Physicians

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