

What Is High Blood Sugar?

Hyperglycemia for children and families

This handout explains the causes, signs and treatment for high blood sugar in diabetes. High blood sugar is also called hyperglycemia (high-per-gligh-see-mee-uh).

What is high blood sugar?

Your blood sugar is high if it stays over 250 mg/dl (using a serum-based glucose monitor). A glucose monitor is also called a glucometer (glue-kohm-uh-ter). Most times high blood sugar starts slowly.

What causes high blood sugar?

- Eating too much food or drinking too much of a drink that contains carbohydrates. (Carbohydrates — kar-bow-high-drates — are a form of sugar or starch and are a major source of energy for the body).
- Not taking enough insulin
- Having the flu or being sick
- Having stress in your life
- Decrease in exercise or activity

What are the signs of high blood sugar?

Circle or point to any signs you've had and learn to recognize them early.

The signs of high blood sugar can be:



Extreme thirst



Hunger

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Headache



**Going to the
bathroom a lot**



Blurred vision



Dry skin



Feeling drowsy



**Feeling sick to your
stomach**

How do I treat high blood sugar?

To treat high blood sugar, follow these steps:

1. If blood sugar is above 250 mg/dl twice in a row, test for ketones (*ketones*). Ketones are chemicals that appear in the urine when body fat is being broken down for energy. Fat is burned by the body when there is not enough insulin to allow sugar to be burned for the energy needed by the body. Ketones are also formed when not enough food has been eaten to provide the energy the body needs. Ketones are measured as being negative, trace/small, moderate or large.
2. If ketones are moderate to large, call your doctor or diabetes nurse.

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To Learn More

- Ask your child's nurse or doctor
- www.seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your child's nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.
- For Deaf and hard of hearing callers 206-987-2280 (TTY).

3. Drink plenty of water and do what your healthcare team instructs you to do.
4. Look for patterns in blood sugars. If blood sugar is high call your doctor for an insulin dose adjustment.

What happens if my blood sugar level stays really high?

If your blood sugar level keeps staying high you may develop DKA (diabetic ketoacidosis — kee-toe-ass-ih-*doh*-sis). This is rare. But if you get DKA you may need to go to the hospital. When you are sick, test your blood sugar often and check for ketones in your urine.

Call your doctor or healthcare provider right away if you have these emergency symptoms:

- Moderate to large ketones in urine
- Upset stomach
- Vomiting
- Deep breathing
- Stomach pain
- Feeling tired or confused
- Fruity smelling breath

For more information

Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation International:
120 Wall Street
New York, NY 10005-4001
1-800-533-CURE (2873)
www.jdf.org

American Diabetes Association:
ATTN: National Call Center
1701 North Beauregard Street
Alexandria, VA 22311
1-800-DIABETES (1-800-342-2383)
www.diabetes.org

Adapted with permission from Children's Diabetes Education Handbook and Denver Hospital and Health Authority's piece on High Blood Sugar. Originally developed by the Center for Children with Special Needs with funding from the WA State Department of Health.

Seattle Children's offers interpreter services for Deaf, hard of hearing or non-English speaking patients, family members and legal representatives free of charge. Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children's. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's healthcare provider.

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