

Medicine-Induced Diabetes

This handout explains how blood sugar levels may change because of medicines you take.

Medicine-Induced Diabetes

Medicines like steroids can cause high blood sugar levels. These medicines prevent your body from keeping blood sugar levels in a normal range. “Normal” blood sugar levels before eating are 70-99 mg/dL. Blood sugar levels 2 hours after meals should be less than 140 mg/dL.

Medicines Affecting Blood Sugars

- Steroids (prednisone, dexamethasone)
- Cyclosporine (Neoral[®], Sandimmune[®])
- Tacrolimus (Prograf[®], Hecoria[®])

Benefits of Managing Blood Sugars

Keeping blood sugar levels as normal as possible will help you heal and lower your risk of infection. You might feel better and have more energy when blood sugar levels are normal.

Long-Term Effects

Some people have high blood sugar levels only when taking these medicines. Others may still need to check blood sugars after the medicines are stopped. Some people also have type 1 or type 2 diabetes which still need to be managed after medicines are stopped.

Checking Blood Sugars

You may need to check your blood sugars at home. Record your results and bring to your clinic visits.

Healthy Eating

Avoid foods and drinks with sugar that cause a rapid rise in blood sugar levels. Limit your intake of high fat foods to avoid weight gain. We suggest a weight loss program for patients who are overweight. Even a small weight loss can improve your blood sugars.

Activity

Activities such as walking or biking help to lower blood sugar levels. Check your blood sugars before, during, and after activity. You may be at risk for low blood sugars up to 24 hours after activity. Before starting an activity program, talk with your health care team about any restrictions you may have.

Medicine

Some people manage their blood sugar levels with healthy eating and more activity. Some people need medicines to keep their blood sugars in a normal range. This could include pills or insulin. Blood sugar levels vary based on the dose of medicine you are taking. When your dose is large, your blood sugars may be high enough to need insulin. As the dose is lowered, stay in close contact with your provider who will also need to adjust your diabetes medicine plan.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 8/2023. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#4451.