

Managing Blood Sugars After Surgery

Blood sugar levels can affect how you heal after surgery. If they are too high, you are at higher risk for an infection. This is true for all patients whether you have diabetes or not.

Because of this, most patients who have surgery will have their blood sugars checked and insulin given if blood sugar levels are too high. This is true whether or not you have diabetes.

How often are blood sugars checked?

Your blood sugars will be checked before, during, and after surgery. If you need insulin, blood sugars will be checked as often as every 1-2 hours.

What are normal blood sugar levels?

Normal blood sugar levels are 70 – 99 mg/dL when fasting and before meals. Blood sugars should be less than 140 mg/dL within 2 hours after eating.

Why do blood sugars get higher with surgery?

There are many reasons. Surgery can cause a stress response and this raises your blood sugar levels. Blood sugars can go up when feeling worried or anxious. Also, medicines such as steroids or changes in your diet or activity can raise your blood sugars.

Does this mean that I have diabetes?

This varies for each person. Some patients do not have diabetes but still have high blood sugars for a short time during or after surgery. For others, high blood sugars could indicate that you have prediabetes or diabetes. Discuss this more with your care team.

What will be done if my blood sugars get too high?

Most patients will receive insulin injections if blood sugars get higher than 150 mg/dL.

What is insulin?

Insulin is a hormone made by the pancreas. It helps to keep blood sugar levels in a normal range.

Why do I need insulin now?

Insulin can get your blood sugars back to normal quickly. It is important to keep your blood sugars as close to normal as possible during and after surgery to lower your risk of infection.

What is an insulin drip?

An insulin drip means that insulin is given through an IV (intravenous). Insulin given this way gets into your body faster and brings down high blood sugars.

Will I need to check my blood sugars or take insulin at home?

This varies for each person. Talk with your care team about what makes sense for you.

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 © 3/2024. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#7364.