

Fact Sheet for People with Diabetes: Diabetic Blood Sugar Tests

Testing for blood sugar control

Taking care of your diabetes can make you feel better and stay healthy. Lowering your blood sugar by any amount lessens your chances of developing diabetic eye, kidney and nerve disease. To control your diabetes, you must know your blood sugar numbers. There are two different tests to measure your blood sugar – a hemoglobin A1c (HbA1c) test and a finger-stick test. You need both tests to get a complete picture of your blood sugar control.

Hemoglobin A1c (HbA1c)

The HbA1c test shows the average amount of sugar that has been in your blood over the last three months. Your doctor does the test by taking a small sample of your blood and sending it to a lab.

Why should I have an HbA1c test?

An HbA1c test is the best way for your doctor to evaluate if your blood sugar is under control. The test shows if your blood sugar level is normal or too high.

Turn this page over to see HbA1c and self-test target levels.

What is a good HbA1c testing goal?

The HbA1c goal for people with diabetes is less than 7 percent. At this level, your treatment plan is probably working and it is likely that your blood sugar is under control.

What happens if an HbA1c is high?

A high HbA1c (greater than 7 percent) means that you have a greater chance for eye disease, kidney disease or nerve damage. Your treatment plan needs to change. You and your physician should work together to develop a treatment plan that reduces your risk.

How often do I need an HbA1c test?

Ask your doctor for an HbA1c test at least two times a year. Get the test more often if your blood sugar stays too high or if your doctor makes any changes in your treatment plan.

What is the finger-stick test?

A finger-stick test involves pricking your finger, putting a drop of blood on a test strip and placing the strip into a blood glucose meter. Unlike the HbA1c test, which measures glucose control over time, a finger-stick measures your blood sugar level at the time of the test.



The Healthcare Quality Improvement Organization of New Jersey, Inc.
557 Cranbury Road, Suite 21 ♦ East Brunswick, NJ 08816
Telephone: 732-238-5570 ♦ Fax: 732-238-7766 ♦ Website: www.pronj.org

HbA1c Test

The HbA1c test provides valuable information about:

- Your average blood sugar levels for the past two or three months (day and night, before and after meals)
- Your risk for having long-term problems from diabetes, such as eye, kidney and nerve damage

The target level for a person with diabetes is less than 7 percent.

	HbA1c Level (%)
Normal	4.0-6.0
Target	<7.0
Change in treatment may be required	>7.0

Ask your doctor for an HbA1c test at least two times a year. Discuss results with him/her to determine if any changes in treatment are required. HbA1c tests are covered by Medicare.

Finger-stick Test

Finger-stick tests are usually done before meals and/or at bedtime. Ideal goals for most people with diabetes when self-testing using a blood glucose meter are:

Time of Test	Ideal Goal	Acceptable
Before meals	80-120 mg/dl	80-140 mg/dl
Before bedtime snack	100-140 mg/dl	100-160 mg/dl

- Your blood sugar goals may be different from the ideal goals. Ask your doctor what goals are best for you.

Lowering your blood sugar by only 30 points decreases your HbA1c by 1 percent and decreases your relative risk of long-term problems by 15-30 percent.

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