

Disaster and Emergency Readiness

Purpose

This section is intended to provide information on how to care for a person with diabetes during a natural disaster.

Objectives

At the end of this section you will:

- Be able to make an emergency plan
- Know what supplies should be in an emergency kit
- Be prepared for hot weather conditions
- Know what food should be in an emergency kit
- Know what to do on a sick day

Outline

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*The American Diabetes Association Recognizes this education service as meeting the National Standards for Diabetes Self-Management Education and Support.

These materials were adapted from Life with Diabetes: A Series of Teaching Outlines by the Michigan Diabetes Research and Training Center, 5th Edition. American Diabetes Association, 2014.

Preparation

As a person with diabetes, your daily routine involves schedules and planning. An emergency can seriously affect your health. It may be difficult to cope with a disaster when it occurs. You and your family should plan and prepare for a disaster even if the event is a loss of electricity for a few hours.

The first 72 hours following a disaster are the most critical for families. This is the time when you are most likely to be alone. It is essential for you and your family to have a disaster plan and kit which should provide for all of your family's basic needs during these first hours.

Getting started

People with diabetes face extra challenges during emergencies and natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, and tornadoes. If you are leaving your home to get away from a threat or staying in an emergency shelter, let other people know that you have diabetes so that you can take care of your health. If you have other health problems, such as chronic kidney disease or heart disease, make sure you let others know about those too.

Drink plenty of fluids, especially water. Safe drinking water may be hard to find in emergencies, but if you do not take in enough water, you could develop serious medical problems. Heat, stress, high blood sugar, and some diabetes medicines such as metformin can cause you to lose fluid. This will increase the chances you will become dehydrated.

Keep something containing sugar with you at all times, in case you develop dangerously low blood sugar (hypoglycemia). You may not be able to check blood sugar levels, so know the warning signs of low blood sugar.

Pay special attention to your feet. Stay out of contaminated water, wear shoes, and examine feet carefully for any sign of infection or injury. Get medical treatment quickly for any injuries.

Making an emergency plan

- Always wear identification that states you have diabetes.
- If you take insulin, ask your doctor what to do in an emergency if you do not have your insulin and cannot get more.
- If you take other medicines for diabetes, ask your doctor what to do during an emergency if you do not have your medicine.
- Prepare an emergency supply of food and water.
- Include an adequate supply of medicine and medical supplies in your emergency kit, enough for at least three days and possibly more, depending on your needs. Ask your doctor or pharmacist about storing prescription medicines such as heart and high blood pressure medicine and insulin. Plan how you will handle medicine that normally requires refrigeration, such as insulin.
- Make sure you change medicine and medical supplies in your emergency kit regularly, to ensure they stay up to date. Check expiration dates on all medicine and supplies often.
- Keep copies of prescriptions and other important medical information, including the phone number for your health care provider, in your emergency kit.
- Keep a list of the type and model number of medical devices you use, such as an insulin pump, in the emergency kit.
- If you have a child with diabetes who is in school or day care, learn the school's emergency plan. Work with them to ensure your child will have needed diabetes supplies in an emergency.
- If you need regular medical treatments, such as dialysis, talk to your service provider about their emergency plans.

Checklist

You should safely store the following medical supplies or have them readily available in case of an emergency. Make sure you have enough supplies for at least two weeks.

These supplies should be checked at least every two or three months. Watch for expiration dates – replace supplies when they expire.

- Copy of your emergency information
- Copy of your medical supplies
- Extra copies of prescriptions
- Insulin
- Prescription medications
- Over-the-counter medications
- Syringes
- Alcohol swabs
- Cotton balls and tissues
- Blood sugar meter
- Extra batteries for meter
- Blood sugar logbook
- Insulin pump supplies if on insulin pump
- Strips for blood sugar meter
- Urine ketone test strips
- Lancing device
- Lancets
- Quick-acting carbohydrates
(for example, glucose tablets,
orange juice, etc.)
- Longer-lasting carbohydrate sources
(for example, cheese and crackers)
- Glucagon emergency kit (if on insulin)
- Hard plastic container for disposing
used lancets and syringes
- Flashlight with batteries
- Extra batteries
- Paper and pencil/pen
- Emergency whistle/noisemaker
- Candles
- Waterproof matches
- Extra pair of eyeglasses
- First-aid kit
- Female sanitary supplies
- Copy of health insurance cards
- Heavy work gloves
- Important family documents
- Tools
- Water
- Food
- Clothing
- Bedding
- Radio with batteries
- Cell phone

Helpful hints about insulin, pens, and syringes

Insulin may be stored at room temperature (59°F to 86°F) for 28 days. Insulin pens in use can be stored at room temperature according to the manufacturer's directions.

Insulin should not be exposed to excessive light, heat or cold. Regular and Lantus insulins should be clear-looking.

NPH, Lente, Ultra Lente, 75/25, 50/50, and 70/30 insulins should be uniformly cloudy before rotating.

Insulin and clumps or sticks to the sides of the bottles should not be used.

Although reuse of your insulin syringes is not generally recommended, in an emergency situation, you have to alter this policy. Do not share your insulin syringes with other people.

Things to remember in a disaster

- Stress can cause a rise in your blood sugar.
- Erratic mealtimes can cause changes in your blood sugar.
- Excessive work to repair damage caused by the disaster (without stopping for snacks) can lower your blood sugar.
- Excessive exercise when your blood sugar is over 250 mg can cause your blood sugar to go higher.
- Wear protective clothing and sturdy shoes.
- Check your feet daily for an irritation, infection, open sores, or blisters. Disaster debris can increase your risk for injury. Heat, cold, excessive dampness and inability to change footwear can lead to infection, especially if your blood sugar is high. Never go without shoes.

Hot weather tips

- Stay indoors in air-conditioned or fan-cooled comfort. Avoid exercising outside.
- Wear light-colored clothing.
- Remain well-hydrated with water.
- Avoid salt tablets unless prescribed by your doctor.
- Seek emergency treatment if you feel fatigue, weakness, abdominal cramps, decreased urination, fever, or confusion.
- Wear diabetes identification at all times.

Food items to be stored for an emergency

These supplies should be checked and replaced yearly:

- 1 large box unopened crackers (for example, saltines)
- 1 jar peanut butter
- 1 small box powdered milk
- 1 gallon or more of water per day per person for at least one week
- Two six-packs of cheese and crackers
- 1 package dry, unsweetened cereal
- 6 cans regular soda
- 6 cans diet soda
- 6 pack canned orange juice or apple juice
- Ultra-high temperature milk
- 6 cans “light” or water-packed fruit
- 1 spoon, fork, and knife per person
- Disposable cups
- 4 packages of glucose tablets or small hard candies for low blood sugar
- 1 can tuna, salmon, shredded chicken, and nuts per person
- Mechanical can opener

Food considerations during a disaster

Food and water supplies may be limited and/or contaminated. Do not eat food or drink water you think may be contaminated. It may be necessary to boil water for ten minutes before drinking.

Drink plenty of water.

Maintain your meal plan to the best of your ability. Your plan should include a variety of meat/meat substitutes, milk/milk products, fruits, vegetables, cereal, and grains. Meat substitutes include peanut butter, dried beans, and eggs.

Limit sugar and foods containing sugar including:

- Jellies, jams, molasses
- Honey
- Syrups (fruits canned in sugar syrup, pancake syrup)
- Frosted cake
- Pre-sweetened or sugar-coated cereals
- Pie, pastry, Danish pastry, donuts
- Chocolate
- Custards, pudding, sherbet, ice cream
- Gelatin
- Soda
- Cookies, brownies

Monitor your blood sugars frequently and record in blood sugar log.

When reading labels, limit products with these sugar-containing ingredients:

- Sugar
- Honey
- Molasses
- Corn syrup
- Sucrose
- Brown sugar
- Dextrose
- Corn sweeteners
- Fruit syrup

Avoid greasy, fried foods.

Try to eat meals and snacks at the same time every day. Avoid periods of hunger and over-indulgence. The quantity and frequency of your food intake should remain similar day-to-day depending upon your activity level.

Increase food and water intake during periods of increased exertion or physical activity by either eating between-meal snacks before activity or by eating additional food with meals.

Carry a fast source of sugar with you at all times (for example, glucose tablets, one small box of raisins, seven small hard sugar candies).

Sick day during disaster

Always take your insulin or medicine on time or close to it. Never omit your insulin unless your doctor has told you otherwise. Insulin is still good if there is no refrigeration. A used or unused bottle of insulin may be kept at room temperature (59°F to 86°F) for 28 days. Discard unrefrigerated insulin after 28 days.

Keep an extra bottle of each type of insulin you use on hand at all times.

Eat within 15 minutes or no later than 30 minutes after taking your insulin (depending on insulin type) or diabetes medicine. Try to eat on time.

Never skip a meal. If you cannot eat solid food because of nausea, vomiting, and or diarrhea, sip regular cola, eat hard candies, fruit, or regular soft drinks instead of following your usual meal plan.

Most important:

- Do not let yourself get dehydrated.
- Drink plenty of liquids in between meal times, sip diet soda (this will not replace food, but can help you be hydrated).
- Rest
- Check your blood sugar. Notify your doctor if your blood sugar average is over 240 mg or if you are ill for two days.
- Test your urine for ketones when:
 - Your blood sugar average is over 240 mg
 - You are vomiting
 - You have symptoms of high blood sugar (increased thirst or hunger than usual, quick weight loss, increased urination, very tired, stomach pain, breathing fast, or fruity-smelling breath)
- Call your doctor if your ketone test is moderate or high and/or if you have symptoms of high blood sugar. You may need more than your usual amount of insulin on a sick day. Your doctor can guide you in this.

If you need medical assistance or are out of all medications, food, and cannot reach your doctor, immediately:

- Go to the nearest hospital
- Contact the police
- Contact the Red Cross
- Go to an emergency medical center

This section has been taken from the International Diabetes Federation recommendations