

# Diabetes

## What is diabetes?

If you have diabetes, your body cannot make or use insulin the right way. Insulin is a hormone that helps control the sugar, or glucose, in your blood. Glucose is the main source of energy for your body. When you have diabetes, the levels of blood glucose are too high.

## How can a disaster affect my health if I have diabetes?

Keeping an eye on your diabetes is very important, especially in a disaster. It may be hard to check glucose levels and take medications, but not doing this can lead to problems, such as:

- Vision problems
- Numbness (lack of feeling) or pain in arms, legs, hands and feet
- Kidney disease
- Higher risk for heart disease
- Poor wound healing
- Decreased immune system
- Diabetic ketoacidosis- this is a serious and life threatening problem

## What can I do during a disaster to protect my health?

Help prevent diabetic problems by:

- Controlling blood pressure and cholesterol control
- Checking your blood sugar levels
- Exercising
- Eating healthy
- Taking your medication or insulin
- Checking your feet and skin for any changes

Pay attention to your health and look for any of the problems listed above. Get help right away if you have any unusual symptoms.

### Foot care

Foot care is very important for people with diabetes. High blood sugar levels and not enough blood to the limbs (arms and legs) can cause nerve damage that reduces feeling in the feet. People with diabetes should check their feet every day and look for any cuts, sores, red spots, swelling and infected toenails. This is very important in a disaster because you may be walking on or over debris. Sores, blisters, breaks in the skin, infections or buildup of calluses should be reported right away.

### Skin care

Skin care is very important too. People with diabetes may have more injuries and infections, so they should protect their skin by keeping it clean, using lotion to avoid dryness and taking care of cuts and bruises. Preventing cuts or scrapes may be hard in a disaster. Be sure to pack first aid items into your emergency supplies kit. If a wound looks infected or not healing right, get medical help right away.

### **Which special tips should I remember if I have diabetes?**

Along with the [emergency kit](#) and [emergency plan](#) remember the following extra items in your emergency kit if you have diabetes:

- Glucose testing supplies
  - Glucose meter, extra insulin, syringes (needles), lancets, blood test strips, ketone test strips and alcohol wipes
- Insulin pump users should have supplies for the pump
- Extra batteries for your glucose meter and insulin pump
- If you use insulin to help control your diabetes, make sure you have a small cooler. Put ice cubes and your insulin in the cooler during an emergency
- An empty hard plastic detergent bottle with cap to put used lancets and syringes (needles)
- Extra copies of prescriptions
- Extra medication

Remember these important tips during a disaster:

- Stress makes blood sugar levels high
- Eating food at different times each day can change your blood sugar levels
- Wear protective clothing and sturdy shoes to avoid injury
- Try not to eat food with sugar
- Carry a fast source of sugar with you just in case you have a low sugar reaction
  - Like 1 small box of raisins, 3 glucose tablets or 6-7 small hard sugar candies