Diabetic Ketoacidosis

Diabetic Ketoacidosis (DKA) can happen when your body does not have enough insulin. Without insulin, your body uses fat instead of sugar for energy. This creates chemicals called ketones. Too many ketones can make you very sick.

DKA can also happen if you miss insulin doses or use expired insulin. You may also be at higher risk if you are new to Type 1 diabetes or have problems with your insulin pump.

Warning signs

Call your doctor if you have signs of high ketones:


Very high blood sugar (more than 250 mg/dL).


Nausea and vomiting.


Feeling thirsty most of the time.


Stomach pain.


Needing to pee often.


Fast breathing.


Dry mouth or dry skin.


Fruity-smelling breath.


Headache.


Feeling tired or confused.

Risk factors

DKA can happen if you:

- Miss insulin doses.
- Use expired or spoiled insulin.
- Have an infection.
- Have a serious injury or surgery.
- Have a heart attack or stroke.
- Are pregnant and have diabetes.
- Drink a lot of alcohol or use illegal drugs.
- Take medications that raise blood sugar.

CENTRAL HEALTH

Treatment

DKA is a medical emergency. Some cases can be treated at home, but most people need care in a hospital. Your doctor will tell you what to do. At the hospital, you may get IV fluids, insulin, and other medicines.

If your doctor says you can treat DKA at home, follow these steps:

- Check your blood sugar every hour.
- Check your ketones using urine strips or a blood ketone meter.
- Drink water, broth, or sugar-free drinks.
- If you feel sick, drink sugar-free drinks only.
- Eat regular meals.
- Take your insulin as prescribed.
- Do not exercise.

Help prevent DKA

You can lower your risk of DKA by following these steps:

- Check your blood sugar often.
- Take your medicines as prescribed.
- Make sure your insulin is not expired.
- Store your insulin safely.
- Make sure your insulin pump is working correctly.
- Follow your sick-day plan.
- Check for ketones when your doctor tells you to.

Understanding ketone levels

Risk level	Ketone level (mmol/L)	Action
Normal	Less than 0.6	No action needed.
Low to moderate risk of DKA	0.6–1.5	Call your doctor for instructions.
High risk of DKA	1.6–2.9	Call your doctor for instructions. If you have warning signs, go to the ER.
Very high risk of DKA	More than 3.0	Go to the ER.