# Why It’s Important to Have a Diabetes Emergency Plan

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## Diabetes Emergency Plan: The Importance of Being Prepared

You might be thinking you don’t need an emergency plan. Your diabetes is well controlled and you feel safe in the knowledge that you are not going to keel over due to too much or too little glucose in your blood.

Unfortunately, diabetes is a capricious beast and there are so many factors that can affect your sugar levels adversely — it’s really important to have an emergency plan in place that you share with your nearest and dearest.

One very simple thing you can do is to make sure you always carry a diabetes kit that includes information about your condition and any medication you take. You can buy specialist jewelry or wristbands, but a note in the front of your diary, in your mobile phone or on a slip of paper in your purse or wallet would be better than nothing.

Other practical steps include the following:

### Have Emergency Snacks

Create an emergency pack of snacks and medication and make sure you always have it to hand. It’s no good in the glove box if you take ill in the mall.

Include some carbohydrates like cookies — you can buy packets with portions of two cookies wrapped together — or potato chips. You could also include dried fruit, a cereal bar, glucose tablets or a glucose or sweet drink — diet versions will not help!

### Check Your Levels

If you start to feel unwell tell anyone who is with you and do a quick blood pinprick test to see how low your sugar levels are. If you are insulin dependent administer an appropriate dosage to correct your level.

Check your blood glucose again about 15 minutes later and eat another snack if it’s not back to normal. Beware of eating too much sugary food or carbs as they could send your levels skyrocketing to the other extreme.

### Make Sure Friends and Family Know

Tell your friends and family about your condition. Some of them might not even realize you have diabetes or if they do know, might not know what to do if you became ill unexpectedly.

Your healthcare provider might have leaflets you can distribute explaining what to do in an emergency, but to be on the safe side it’s probably wise to just advise them to ring an ambulance if you become woozy, sweaty, shaky, slur your words or become confused.

Obviously, if you become fully unconscious you need to be placed in the recovery position, someone should call emergency services.

## Avoiding Emergencies

Now let's look at some of the situations that you might not realize could affect your blood glucose, and how you can avoid the need to implement your emergency plan.

### Weather

Have you checked the weather forecast? It's useful for people with diabetes to understand how diabetes and body temperature interact. It varies from person to person but some people find extremes of cold or heat can affect their ability to process insulin and send their blood glucose readings haywire.

In cold weather, all types of diabetics tend to find their Hba1C readings creep up. This might be due to a tendency to gain weight in winter or being less keen or able to exercise. Stress caused by the busy and expensive winter holidays or by colds or flu can also affect glucose readings.

If pin-prick testing becomes difficult or painful try warming your hands before using your machine. Don't avoid testing just because it hurts a little more in cold weather.

Keep your glucose monitor and any medications at the correct temperature – leaving your monitor in a cold car overnight could cause it to produce inaccurate readings.

Hot weather can also be an issue as diabetics tend to suffer more with heat-related illness than the rest of the population. Keep cool by using a portable fan, wearing loose layers of clothes made with natural fabrics and stay well hydrated.

If you need to transport medications that normally need to be in the fridge or room temperature, pop them into an insulated bag before you head off for a hot sunny day out.

### Exercise

Try and keep exercise levels steady and to dress appropriately. Be careful when increasing or decreasing your normal exercise levels. Your body gets used to the level of exercise you do and if forced to cut down due to illness, injury or another change in circumstance or if you suddenly increase your levels, you might find you have some unexpected blood glucose readings.

### Sickness

Avoid becoming ill. This seems a silly thing to say, I know — no-one deliberately gets sick But there are precautions you can take to minimize your risk of being infected with illnesses like coughs, colds and stomach bugs, which can cause your blood glucose readings to become erratic.

Wash your hands regularly — and by this, I don't mean rinse them briefly under the faucet. Use detergent and pretend you are a surgeon, washing everywhere including in between your fingers and the backs of your hands.

If you need some motivation to wash your hands regularly and properly, just think about how many people have touched the handle of the supermarket cart before you. One US study led by Dr. Charles Gerba, a professor of microbiology at the University of Arizona, found that 72 percent of trolleys tested carried more dirt and germs (including fecal matter and E. coli) than the average public toilet.

The research team recommended wiping them down before use to avoid getting sick. The same advice applies to public telephones, keyboards other people use, and ATMs.

A less extreme solution might be to carry a small bottle of hand sanitizer and use it after touching dubious surfaces.