

Diabetic Ketoacidosis (DKA)

What is DKA?

Diabetic ketoacidosis [kee-toe-as-seh-DOH-sis], or **DKA**, is a condition caused by a combination of high blood glucose, dehydration, and ketones [KEY-tones]. Your (or your child's) body makes ketones when fat is burned for energy instead of glucose (sugar).

Ketones can build up in the blood and urine (pee). This makes the blood acidic, which can make you or your child really sick.

DKA is often present when a person is first diagnosed with diabetes (usually type 1).

What causes DKA?

DKA usually happens when the body doesn't get enough insulin during stress or illness. Signs that you or your child may have DKA include:

- An infection or serious illness
- Not checking for and treating ketones
- Not taking enough insulin

What are the symptoms of DKA?

Common symptoms of DKA include:

- Stomach pain
- Vomiting
- Fruity-smelling breath (from ketones)
- Excessive thirst and dry mouth
- Sleepiness or confusion
- Deep and rapid breathing
- Headache
- Ketones in the urine



What do I need to do next?

- 1** If your (or your child's) blood glucose is higher than or equal to 300 mg/dL twice in a row, **check for ketones using urine- or blood-testing strips.**
- 2** If your ketones are large or above 1.5 mmol/L, **use the sick-day guidelines from your doctor or diabetes educator.**
- 3** If you (or your child) can't keep fluids down, feel sleepy or don't have any energy, or are having trouble breathing, **go to the nearest emergency room.**

How is DKA treated?

DKA is usually treated in a hospital, because it is very serious and requires close monitoring. To treat DKA, healthcare providers:

- Give extra insulin to lower ketone production and blood glucose
- Give IV (intravenous) fluids for hydration
- Look for signs of illness or infection and treat them if needed

Most people get better in 1 to 2 days. However, DKA can cause other serious health problems or death.

