

How To Measure Your Blood Sugar

How can you tell if your blood sugar is in a healthy range, and if you're eating the right foods to keep it there? The best way is to test your blood glucose level regularly—and luckily, this is easy to do, either on your own or at the doctor's office.

Here's how.

Measuring your blood sugar at home

Monitoring your blood glucose at home is a powerful way to determine which foods elevate it excessively and which foods don't. In addition, tracking your numbers over time can alert you if your blood sugar begins to rise to prediabetic or diabetic levels.

Obviously, you should test your blood sugar regularly if you're already diabetic. (That's a no-brainer.) It's also important to check it on a regular basis if:

- You're prediabetic
- You've been diagnosed with insulin resistance or metabolic syndrome
- You have polycystic ovary syndrome (which increases your risk for diabetes)
- You have a strong family history of diabetes
- You're overweight

To measure your blood sugar at home, you'll need a glucometer and a supply of test strips and lancets. You may be able to get prescriptions for these: if not, you can buy them without prescriptions either at a pharmacy or online.

Glucometers are fairly cheap and sometimes even free, while test strips are pricey. Your best bet, if money is an issue, is to shop around for the meter that comes with the least expensive test strips. Be sure to buy strips specifically designed for your meter.

While you're shopping, pick up a sharps container. These containers are very inexpensive, and they'll allow you to dispose of your used lancets safely. The manual that comes with your glucometer will give you step-by-step instructions for using it. Here are the basic steps:

For a fasting blood sugar test, test first thing in the morning before eating or drinking, or at a minimum wait at least four hours after your last meal. For a non-fasting blood sugar test, measure your level two hours after a meal. Wash your hands well and dry them thoroughly. Using very warm water, and

shaking your hands or rubbing them together after washing them, will help increase the blood circulation in your fingers.

Insert a lancet into the lancet device that comes with the meter. You can adjust the lancet device to the most comfortable setting that will still give you a drop of blood, so experiment with this. Don't reuse lancets, because this increases your discomfort (since they get dull) and can raise your risk of infection.

Insert a test strip into the meter.

Prick the side of your fingertip—not the pad, which has more nerve endings—with the lancet, and squeeze your finger until you get a drop of blood. (Tip: switch fingers each time you test.)

Touch the edge of the test strip to the drop of blood, making sure you get enough blood on the strip.

When the number appears on the meter, write it down, along with the date and time of day. Save this information so you can track your numbers over time. Also, make a note of how your blood sugar responds to certain foods—for instance, fruits, starchy vegetables, and grains. This will help you make smart food choices.

Be sure to calibrate your meter regularly. Also, make sure your test strips and control solution (used for calibration) are not out of date.

To get a good feel for your blood glucose range, test yourself several times each day for several days or weeks. Your blood glucose numbers may vary quite a bit from day to day, but eventually you'll detect a pattern. In general, here are normal, prediabetic, and diabetic blood sugar levels:

	NORMAL	PREDIABETIC	DIABETIC
FASTING	70-100 mg/dl	100-125 mg/dl	126 mg/dl or higher
TWO HOURS AFTER EATING	under 140 mg/dl	140-199 mg/dl	200 mg/dl or higher

Tests your doctor can do

Your doctor can order lab tests to check your blood sugar level. One is a simple fasting blood glucose test. Another is an A1c, also called an HbA1c or glycated hemoglobin test.

The A1c, which is a simple blood test, is important because it tells you what your average blood sugar level was over the previous three months. It does this by measuring the percentage of your hemoglobin that is glycated, or coated with sugar.

Here's how to interpret your A1c results:

Normal:	below 5.7%
Prediabetic:	5.7% to 6.4%
Diabetic:	6.5% or higher

Your doctor may also order an oral glucose tolerance test, in which you drink a sugary solution and have your blood drawn several times over the next few hours. Doctors use this test primarily to diagnose gestational diabetes, which is diabetes occurring during pregnancy, but they can also use it to check for type 2 diabetes.

The bottom line: Know your numbers

If you're serious about staying healthy, your fasting blood glucose level and your A1c are two of the most important numbers you can know. So have your doctor check your A1c and fasting blood glucose level at least once a year, and consider monitoring your blood sugar at home as well. Staying on top of your blood sugar numbers is easy—and it's one of the most important steps you can take to stay slim, healthy, and diabetes-free forever.