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## Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) Program: A Guide for NIHB Clients on Blood Glucose Test Strips

*Testing for a Reason: New Information about Type 2 Diabetes and Blood Sugar Testing*

### Blood Sugar Testing

Testing blood sugar at home using test strips and a meter is common practice for people with type 2 diabetes. The results can help you:

- See how food and exercise affect your sugar level
- Understand how well your diabetes treatments are working
- Guide any changes that should be made to your diet, activity level, or other treatment

### How Often Should I Be Testing My Blood Sugar?

New Canadian and international research shows that most people with type 2 diabetes who are *not using insulin* don't need to regularly self-test their blood sugar, because self-testing does not improve their blood sugar control or quality of life in a significant way. **So, if you manage your diabetes by diet alone or with pills, you can self-test less often without harming your health.**

### Testing For a Reason

When you do self-test your blood sugar, make sure to take action based on the result. In other words, test for a reason! Your health care provider can help you decide what to do if your blood sugar level is too high or too low.

### NIHB's Coverage of Blood Glucose Test Strips

The number of test strips that will be covered by the NIHB Program will depend on the client's medical treatment:

Diabetes Treatment History	Number of test strips reimbursed	How often can I test within the strip allowance?	Which category am I in?
Clients managing diabetes with insulin	500 / 100 days	5 times per day	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clients managing diabetes with diabetes medication with high risk of causing hypoglycemia (low blood sugar)	400 / 365 days	Once daily	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clients managing diabetes with diabetes medication with low risk of causing hypoglycemia	200 / 365 days	3 to 4 times per week	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clients managing diabetes with diet/lifestyle therapy only (no insulin or diabetes medications)	200 / 365 days	3 to 4 times per week	<input type="checkbox"/>

## **I Don't Use Insulin, But Are There Times When I Should Test More Often?**

If you're *not using insulin* to manage your diabetes, you don't need to test your blood sugar regularly, but there are important times when you may want to test more often. These include when:

- You are at risk of having low blood sugar (because you take a sulfonylurea drug, for example)
- Your blood sugar level goes up and down or is hard to control
- You have major changes in your daily routine or your medications change
- You are sick (with the flu or an infection, for example)
- You are pregnant or trying to get pregnant
- Low blood sugar is a safety hazard at your job

In these types of situations, be sure to talk to your health care provider about when and how often you should be testing your blood sugar.

## **What Are the Signs of Low Blood Sugar?**

- Feeling shaky or weak
- Cold sweats
- Pounding heartbeat
- Headache
- Feeling cranky or nervous
- Tingling skin or numbness
- Hunger
- Upset stomach
- Unclear thinking

## **What Else Can I Do to Manage My Diabetes?**

Many people think that self-testing their blood sugar is the main way to manage their diabetes, but taking care of your diabetes includes so much more. There's a lot that you can do to stay healthy and prevent complications:

- Be active: Walking regularly is a good start.
- Take all your medications according to your health care provider's instructions.
- Eat healthy meals and avoid junk food.
- Make sure your blood pressure and cholesterol levels are in a healthy range.
- Go for regular eye checkups.
- Regularly check your feet for any sores.
- Manage your stress well.
- See your health care providers regularly and talk about your A1<sub>c</sub> results.

## **The A1<sub>c</sub> Test**

Today, health care providers mainly use a lab test called an A1<sub>c</sub> test to keep track of your blood sugar. The A1<sub>c</sub> test is a blood test that is done up to four times per year. The results give your health care provider an overall picture of how well your treatments are working to control your blood sugar. Keeping track of your A1<sub>c</sub> results is another tool you can use to manage your diabetes.

## **Where can I get more information?**

There are many ways you can learn more about diabetes and get support:

- Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health (CADTH): [www.cadth.ca/diabetes-library](http://www.cadth.ca/diabetes-library)
- Canadian Diabetes Association: [www.diabetes.ca](http://www.diabetes.ca)