



Diabetes and Fasting



Why fast? People fast (don't eat or drink anything) for many reasons. For example, before you go for some blood tests, you may need to fast. You may also be told not to eat or drink anything before surgery or some procedures, like a colonoscopy. Another reason people fast is for religious holidays.

What should I do if I want to fast? Most religions say that it is okay if people with diabetes don't fast. But some patients want to anyway. There are some diabetes patients who should NOT fast for religious holidays because it is not safe. For example, if you are pregnant and have diabetes, it is not safe for you to fast. Also, you should not fast for religious holidays if you have an infection, had a recent heart attack, or if your blood sugar is not well controlled.

If you want to fast for a religious holiday, you should talk with your prescriber before you begin your fast. It is important to know what medicines you can or cannot take before and during the fast. You should know how to plan your exercise or activity before and during the fast. You will also need to check your blood sugar more often. Make sure you know what to do if your blood sugar gets too high or too low. If your blood sugar gets too low, you may need to stop the fast. If you are fasting for a blood test, surgery, or a medical procedure, try to time your test or procedure for first thing in the morning. This way you won't have to fast too long.

How does fasting affect my diabetes meds? Insulin will cause your blood sugar to get too low if you do not eat or drink anything. The same is true for some diabetes drugs that are taken around mealtimes. Talk with your prescriber about which drugs you should or should not take before or during your fast. Your prescriber may also change the dose of your diabetes drugs, and the time of day you take them.

What to do and watch for if I fast? There are a few things you need to watch for if you fast. Your blood sugar may get too low during a fast, so you need to check it often. If your blood sugar gets too low you may feel sick to your stomach, shaky, confused, cold and sweaty, or have a fast heartbeat. Ask your prescriber what blood sugar number is too low for you. Also, make sure you know what to do if your blood sugar gets too low. During your fast, keep some kind of sugar source with you like glucose tablets, juice, hard candies, pretzels, or crackers in case your blood sugar gets too low. For other diabetes patients, blood sugar that gets too high can be a problem during a fast. For someone with type 1 diabetes, this is very dangerous. If you have type 1 diabetes, you will still need to take some insulin while you fast, but you will likely need a lower dose. Your prescriber will tell you what to do with your insulin if you are fasting. It is important to talk with your prescriber if you have diabetes and will be fasting. Make sure you ask questions about how best to take your diabetes drugs, so that you can fast safely.

How to manage my diabetes during fasting? Sulfonylureas, insulin, Prandin, and Starlix are the biggest culprits for hypoglycemia. For fasting labs, try to get them done by 9 AM. Hold your oral hypoglycemic or SHORT-acting or MIXED insulin until you eat.. But it's usually okay to take LONG-acting insulin...IF you get the labs done early and eat shortly after. For longer fasts for surgery, etc, do not take oral hypoglycemics the evening before and holding these and short-acting insulins until you eating again. Also consider reducing the dose of long-acting or basal insulin by one-third to one-half. Caution: type 1s SHOULD NOT stop their basal insulin. Metformin, Actos, Byetta, Victoza, Januvia, Onglyza, and Tradjenta don't usually cause hypoglycemia on their own. For fasting labs, it's usually not necessary to stop these drugs...except Byetta since it's taken before meals. For longer fasts, try holding these other oral meds too.

Ramadan is a different story because people fast during the day and eat only at night for a month. You need to discuss possible med changes in advance. In general, some morning meds may be switched to the evening instead. You should stop any fast if glucose falls below 70 mg/dL...or below 90 mg/dL if you are at higher risk for hypoglycemia. You will need to have some glucose or other carbohydrate on hand if necessary.

If your diabetes is poorly controlled, or have acute illness or during pregnancy, fasting is discouraged.