

# Take Charge of Your Diabetes

SAN FRANCISCO  
HEALTH PLAN



Here for you

## What Is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a disease that causes your blood glucose (also called blood sugar) to be too high.

- Your body changes most of the food you eat into sugar (glucose). Your body makes insulin which helps the sugar (glucose) to get into the body's cells.
- When you have diabetes, your body either doesn't make enough insulin, or your body can't use its own insulin very well.



## There are three types of diabetes:

- **Type 1 diabetes:** Your body does not make enough insulin.
- **Type 2 diabetes:** Your body makes less insulin and does not use it the right way.
- **Gestational diabetes:** This type of diabetes can develop in the second half of pregnancy. If you have had gestational diabetes, your risk of developing diabetes after pregnancy is higher.

## Diabetes has a big impact on your health

If you have diabetes, sugar levels in your blood are too high. Over time, having high blood sugar can lead to major problems with your heart, nerves, kidneys, eyes, and blood vessels. Diabetes can also cause you to get infections more often. Two of the biggest problems caused by diabetes are heart attacks and stroke. You can work with your Primary Care Provider\* (PCP) to prevent these problems (see [Taking Charge of Your Diabetes](#) on pg. 2).

*\*Your Primary Care Provider is the doctor, physician assistant, or nurse practitioner in charge of your health care.*



**The most common symptom of diabetes is no symptoms, especially when early. When you have diabetes, high blood sugar may cause one or more of these symptoms:**

- Losing weight without trying
- Feeling tired
- Peeing often
- Blurry vision
- Feeling irritated
- Are hungry often
- Have numb or tingling hands or feet

**Please call your PCP if you are having these symptoms.** It may mean that your blood sugar is not well controlled.

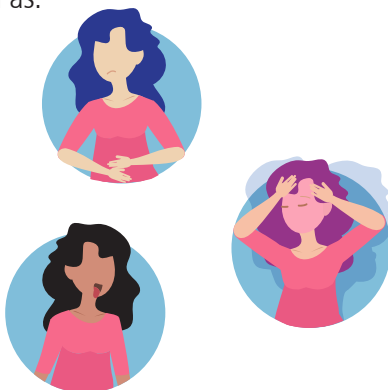
**Be prepared:** If you have diabetes, you should wear an alert bracelet that emergency medical staff can find. You should always carry a sugar source, such as glucose tablets or fruit juices. This can help you if you get low blood sugar from medicine or other sources.

## Signs and Symptoms of a Diabetic Emergency

### Severe Hyperglycemia (very high blood sugar)

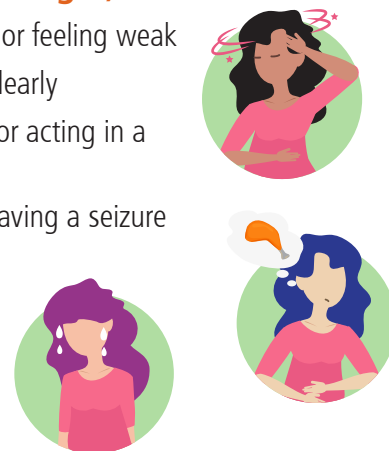
Very high blood sugar can cause a person to pass out (lose consciousness) and go into a coma. People may have symptoms for a few days such as:

- Flushed face
- Dry skin and mouth
- Nausea or throwing up
- Stomach pain
- Deep, rapid breathing
- Fruity breath odor
- Having dark yellow or brown urine



### Severe Hypoglycemia (very low blood sugar)

- Trouble walking or feeling weak
- Trouble seeing clearly
- Being confused or acting in a strange way
- Passing out or having a seizure
- Shaking
- Sweating
- Headache
- Hunger



Learn how to treat blood low blood sugar at [CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/).

If you think you are having symptoms of very high or very low blood sugar, call the SFHP Nurse Advice Line at **1(877) 977-3397** or go to the nearest hospital.

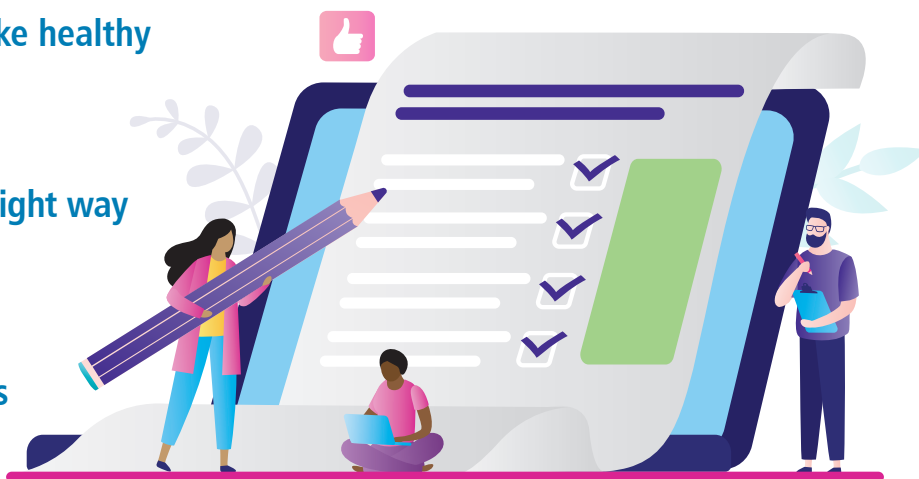
## Taking Charge of Your Diabetes

**Diabetes is a lifelong condition. But by taking action, you can live a healthy life and help prevent the complications of diabetes.**

The best way to take care of yourself when you have diabetes is to work with your health care team to keep your blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol levels in a healthy range. (See **Step 5: Do Your Routine Screenings** on pg. 5 for more about these tests.)

Lifestyle changes are important. Even small changes can make a big difference in helping you manage your blood sugar, stay healthy, and prevent complications of diabetes. Here are 8 steps you can take to take charge of your diabetes:

1. Be more physically active
2. Stay at a healthy weight and make healthy food choices
3. Quit smoking and vaping
4. Take your diabetes medicine the right way
5. Do your routine screenings
6. Take care of your mental health
7. Get up to date with your vaccines
8. Make an action plan



## Step 1: Be More Physically Active

Moving your body can have a big impact on your health. Exercise can help you to:

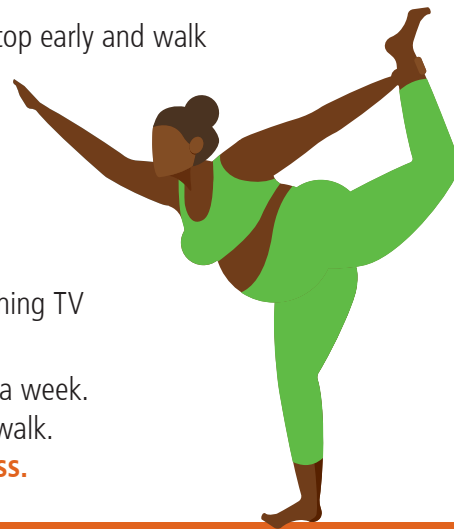
- Lower your blood sugar and your blood pressure
- Lower your risk for heart disease and stroke
- Keep your heart and bones strong
- Help you lose weight
- Give you more energy
- Lower your stress level
- Lower your bad cholesterol (LDL) and raise your good cholesterol (HDL)



For most people, it's best to aim for 30 minutes of activity a day, at least 5 days a week. You can also split up your activity for the day, such as taking a quick 10-minute walk. Learn more with the "Physical Activity" fact sheet from **SFHP Health & Wellness**.

**Find activities that work for you. Here are some ideas:**

- Stand instead of sitting while you talk on the phone
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator
- Take a brisk walk with a friend
- Get off the bus or train one stop early and walk
- Dance at home, or go to a dance class
- Do tai chi or yoga
- Go for a bike ride or ride a stationary bike
- Lift small weights while watching TV



## Step 2: Stay at a Healthy Weight and Make Healthy Food Choices

Being overweight or obese with diabetes raises your risk of health problems. You don't have to lose a lot of weight to start seeing results. Losing just 5 pounds can help you feel better and get healthier. Talk with your health care team to find a plan that will work for you. A healthy diet for a person with diabetes is mostly the same as a healthy diet for a person without diabetes.



Learn about eating healthy with the "Healthier Eating" fact sheet from **SFHP Health & Wellness**.

**Choosing healthy foods helps you to:**

- Keep your blood sugar in your goal range
- Feel good each day
- Lose weight (if you need to)
- Lower your risk for heart disease, stroke, and other problems caused by diabetes



**Use the Plate Method Most Days:**

- **Non-starchy vegetables**—half of your plate (spinach, bok choy, broccoli, green beans, salad)
- **Whole grains and starches**—a quarter of your plate (brown rice, oats, corn tortillas, whole wheat bread)
- **Lean protein**—a quarter of your plate (seafood, chicken, eggs, beans, tofu)
- **Fruits**—2 servings daily such as berries or kiwi instead of bananas
- **Dairy**—Use 1-2% low fat or nonfat milk, yogurt, or 2 ounces of cheese
- **Healthy fats** (olive or canola oil, avocado, nuts)
- **Watch your portions** by using a smaller plate



Visit **myplate.gov** for helpful tips and budget-friendly food ideas.

## Step 2: Stay at a Healthy Weight and Make Healthy Food Choices (continued)

### Okay to Eat and Drink

#### Occasionally, in Small Amounts:

- Chicken skin, red meat, processed meats (like ham, bacon, and sausage)
- Butter, whole milk, and cream
- Cakes, cookies, and other baked goods
- Coffee and tea with caffeine
- Alcohol

#### Avoid:

- Sweet drinks (sodas, sugary tea, juice, boba)
- Processed foods (chips, instant noodles, fast food, packaged sweets)
- Fried foods (french fries, chicken nuggets, crispy tacos)

### Other Healthy Eating Tips:

- **Try not to eat meals too close together**, or snack a lot during the day. It can make your blood sugar levels too high.
- **Water is the best drink choice.** It tastes great when you flavor it with fresh fruit, mint, or cucumber slices. Try having a glass before you eat, and a sip between each bite.
- If you're still hungry after eating, have some **more non-starchy veggies**. Foods like asparagus, carrots, or tomatoes won't raise your blood sugar.
- **Eat slowly** until you are 80% full. It takes a while for your body to feel full. Wait a few minutes before having another serving. You may find you no longer want it.
- **Make your plate colorful.** Avoid white foods and have a variety of green, red, purple, orange, and yellow at each meal. These foods have important nutrients and help keep your blood sugar down.



## Step 3: Quit Smoking and Vaping

Smoking and other tobacco use puts people with diabetes at much higher risk. Smoking raises your blood sugar, cholesterol, and blood pressure. If you quit smoking, you will lower your risk for heart attack, stroke, nerve disease, kidney disease, and mouth disease.



Once you decide to quit smoking, there are lots of things you can do to raise your chances of staying tobacco-free. Learn about quitting smoking and vaping with the "Smoking and Vaping" fact sheet from **SFHP Health and Wellness**. Here are some tips:

- Talk to your PCP about quitting. Your care team can connect you to resources like classes and support groups.
- Your PCP can prescribe you Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) that you can pick up at a pharmacy. You can get NRT at no cost through Medi-Cal. NRT can be in the form of gum, patches, lozenges, spray, or an inhaler.

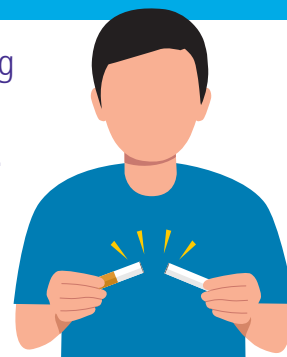


- Call Kick It California at **1(800) 300-8086** for free help with quitting. Their coaches are experts at helping people with the process. You can get a coach that speaks your language. Visit **kickitca.org** to learn more.



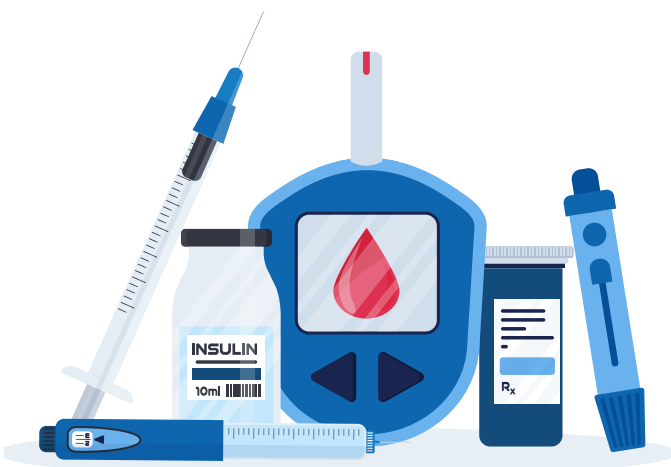
- Get 24/7 help on your smart phone with apps like QuitGuide or quitSTART. They give you help based on your smoking patterns, moods, motivations to quit, and goals. Learn more at **smokefree.gov**.

- Tell your loved ones about your plan to quit. Ask for their help and support. Team up with a friend or partner to quit with you.
- Use your Amazon Alexa device to help you quit. Say "Alexa, open Stop Smoking/Stop Vaping." This program led by the School of Medicine at UC San Diego will give you the "Stop Vaping Coach" skill on Alexa. You can get quit vaping tips and also sign up to speak with a Kick It California Quit Coach.
- Text QUIT SMOKING or QUIT VAPING to **66819** for tips and 24/7 support. For teens, ages 13-17, the SmokeFreeTXT program offers daily support to quit smoking. Text QUIT to **47848**.



## Step 4: Take Your Diabetes Medicine the Right Way

People with type 1 diabetes must use insulin. Some people with type 2 diabetes can manage their diabetes with healthy eating and exercise. Many people take pills and/or insulin to help meet target blood sugar levels. Talk to your PCP about what diabetes medicine is right for you.



### Things to remember about your diabetes medicine:

- Take your medicine exactly as your PCP tells you to.
- Keep track of all of your medications. (There is a chart on pg. 10 where you can list all of the medications you are taking.)
- Make sure that you have enough medicine each month. Call your pharmacy or PCP to check that you will get your refill on time, and not run out of medicine.

### Here are some tips to help remind you to take your medicine:

- Set a timer or alarm on your phone.
- Use a pill organizer box.
- Place a reminder somewhere you look everyday (such as near your toothbrush).

## Step 5: Do Your Routine Screenings

When you have diabetes, it is important to get regular tests and screenings. Going over your test results gives your care team information to help keep your diabetes in control. These are the common tests you may need:



**A1c:** The A1c test (hemoglobin A1c or HbA1c) is a blood test done by your PCP at least twice a year. It helps your PCP see how your blood sugar has been over the past three months. Most people with diabetes should aim for an A1c less than 7%. Some people with diabetes should aim for a lower A1c or higher A1c. Talk to your PCP about what level is right for you.



**Blood Sugar:** Checking your blood sugar (glucose) often is the main tool you have to know if your diabetes is in control. Talk with your PCP about getting a glucose meter at no cost with Medi-Cal. It will help you track your blood sugar at home. Keep a log of your blood sugar levels and share it with your PCP at your next visit.



**Blood Pressure:** Blood pressure is the force of blood against the arteries when the heart beats and rests. Having high blood pressure with diabetes can lead to problems with your heart, eyes, and kidneys. Most people should aim for a blood pressure of less than 120/80 mmHg. Get your blood pressure checked at each PCP visit. If it is high, you can work with your PCP to make lifestyle changes and/or start taking medicine to lower it. You can also get a home blood pressure monitor at no cost with Medi-Cal.



Learn about having a healthy blood pressure with the “High Blood Pressure (Hypertension)” fact sheet from **SFHP Health and Wellness**.

## Step 5: Do Your Routine Screenings (continued)



**Eye Health:** Diabetes is the leading cause of blindness among US adults ages 18 and older. 1 of 2 people with diabetes do not get their eyes checked each year. Often people do not get treatment in time. Getting an eye exam each year can lower your risk of vision loss by 95%. Talk to your PCP if you have changes in your eyes, such as:

- Blurry vision
- Dark or empty spots of vision

Make sure to get a complete eye exam each year. A complete eye exam includes eye dilation. This is when a doctor will give you eye drops to make your pupil larger for a short time. It helps your doctor see the inside of your eye and look for any changes. Often eye problems don't have any symptoms in the early stages. Find a vision provider at [vsp.com](https://www.vsp.com) or call **1(800) 866-7195**.



**Foot Health:** If you have diabetes, you may be more likely to have problems with your feet and get an infection. Take care of your feet by:

- Washing your feet daily
- Checking your feet for signs of wounds or infection each day
- Wearing the right shoes for your feet, such as wide-fitting, or with arches for support
- Checking for wrinkles in your socks before putting on your shoes
- Not walking barefoot



**Cholesterol:** Cholesterol is a soft, waxy substance in the blood and the body's cells. Having a high LDL (low-density lipoprotein, or often known as the bad type of cholesterol) can clog your blood vessels. It can also increase your risk for heart attack or stroke. The goal for most people is to have less than 100 mg/dL. Talk with your PCP if you need to use medicine to cut the risk of heart attack. Taking steps for a healthy lifestyle can help lower your cholesterol.

## Step 6: Take Care of Your Mental Health

Taking care of your emotional and mental health is just as important as taking care of your body. Often it can be helpful to talk with a professional counselor about emotional ups and downs in your life, especially if they start to get worse and take a toll on you.

Each person's diabetes experience is unique, but there are some feelings that many people with diabetes go through at one time or another:



### Fear and worry

about the future, about your health

### Loss of control

"I'll never get a handle on this"

### Denial

"This can't be happening to me, I'm not sick"

### Anger

"It's not fair, my body is turning against me"

### Guilt

"I must have done something to make this happen"

### Shame

"What will others think?"





## Step 6: Take Care of Your Mental Health (continued)

### Find ways to manage stress in your life

Stress is part of daily life. But stress can have a big impact on diabetes. Stress hormones can increase your blood sugar level. When you are stressed you may eat more, drink more alcohol, or exercise less.

- As much as possible, try to avoid **situations that trigger stress** for you.
- **Practice gratitude** by journaling or jotting a few things you are grateful for each morning. What you think, how you think, what you expect, and what you tell yourself often decide how well you manage rising stress levels.
- **Talk with someone** about your problems. Reach out to friends and family for support.
- If you want extra support, talking with a **licensed mental health expert** can help. You can get connected with a mental health expert at no cost with SFHP.



### Take an active role in taking care of yourself

Making healthy lifestyle changes can help improve your diabetes.

- **Get some exercise** and move your body on most days of the week! It is a great way to burn off the effects of stress—walking, dancing, yoga, and stretching are good activities.
- **Get enough sleep.** It can help your immune system stay strong and help your mood, so you can feel happier and less stressed. Most people need 7 or 8 hours a night. Try to go to bed and wake up at about the same time every day, even on weekends.
- **Eat healthy food as often as possible.** (See the healthy eating tips on pgs. 3-4.)

### Learn and practice relaxation exercises

Relaxation exercises are simple to do and combine deep breathing, releasing of muscle tension, and clearing of negative thoughts.

You can try:

- **Repetitive phrases**—repeat a phrase that triggers a physical relaxation, such as “Relax and Let Go.”
- **Imagery**—use your imagination to picture a person, place, or time that makes you feel relaxed, peaceful, and happy.



### Free Resources for SFHP Members

Professionals are available to help you manage these kinds of issues in your life. You can find free local services to help you get back on track and feel better.

#### Medi-Cal Members

Call Caredon Behavioral Health at **1(855) 371-8117**.

#### Healthy Workers HMO Members

Call San Francisco Behavioral Health Services (SFBHS) at **1(888) 246-3333**.

## Step 7: Get Up to Date with Your Vaccines

Diabetes makes it harder for your immune system to fight infections. You may be at risk for more serious illness than other people without diabetes. Vaccines are one of the safest ways for you to protect your health.



### Vaccines you need:

- **Influenza (flu)** yearly vaccine protects against serious illness caused by the flu (a respiratory virus)
- **Pneumococcal (PCV)** prevents pneumonia (lung infection), meningitis (brain infection)
- **Diphtheria (DTaP)** prevents breathing problems, muscle spasms, whooping cough
- **Hepatitis B (HepB)** prevents hepatitis B virus related liver disease and cancer
- **Zoster** prevents shingles
- **COVID-19** prevents Coronavirus disease



Ask your PCP if you are missing any vaccines. Check **CDC** for what vaccines you should get.

## Step 8: Make an Action Plan

**Partner with your care team. You can take control of your diabetes together.**

- **Find a health care provider** you feel comfortable with.
- **Keep your appointments** so you can get the best care possible.
- **Ask questions about your care.** Make a list of questions before your visit. There is a space on the next page for you to write down your questions. Bring a trusted friend or family member to your next visit if you need help asking questions.
- **Create an action plan.** Pick something you care about. Think about what is realistic for you. Take that goal and break it into small steps so that you can succeed!



### You CAN do it!

First, circle the area(s) you want to work on:

1. Be more physically active
2. Stay at a healthy weight and make healthy food choices
3. Quit smoking and vaping
4. Take the right diabetes medicine
5. Do your routine screenings
6. Take care of your mental health
7. Get up to date with your vaccines
8. Make an action plan

Now that you know what you want to work on, create an action plan on the next page. Keep in mind that change takes time. Once you choose a goal, break down the steps you will take this week to reach that goal. Be patient with yourself and take it one day at a time.



## Step 8: Make an Action Plan (continued)

### Make an Action Plan

Fill out the form below and bring it to your next appointment with your PCP.

**Goal:** What do you *want* to do?

When will you do it (day of week/time of day)?

For how long will you do it (minutes or number of times)?

Where will you do it?

How confident are you, on a scale of 0 to 10 (0=not at all confident, 10=totally confident)?

If you are below a 7, you may want to change something in your plan so you will get to a 7 and have success!

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

## Rate Your Health!

### Life with Diabetes Questions

Fill out the form below and bring it to your next appointment with your PCP.

Do you know how to manage your diabetes?

Yes

☐

No

☐

Sometimes

☐

I don't know

☐

Do you see your provider regularly to help manage your diabetes?

Yes

☐

No

☐

Sometimes

☐

I don't know

☐

Do you take your medicine exactly as your provider advises? If not, what gets in the way? Explain here:

Yes

☐

No

☐

Sometimes

☐

I don't know

☐

Do you have family or friends that can help you manage your health?

Yes

☐

No

☐

Sometimes

☐

I don't know

☐

Do you have any cultural or religious values that affect your care?

Yes

☐

No

☐

Sometimes

☐

I don't know

☐

Do you have any problems with keeping your PCP visits? If yes, what gets in the way? Explain here:

Yes

☐

No

☐

Sometimes

☐

I don't know

☐

Do you have a car or access to MUNI/BART or other transportation?

Yes

☐

No

☐

Sometimes

☐

I don't know

☐

## Rate Your Health! (continued)

### Life with Diabetes Questions (continued)

Are you interested in going to classes to help you handle your diabetes better?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	I don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
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What worries you most about your diabetes?

There may be changes you could make in your life to improve your health. On a scale of 1–5, where would you place yourself on being ready to make these changes? (1 is not even thinking about it, and 5 is already doing it)	1	2	3	4	5
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### How Are You Feeling?

Over the past two weeks, how often have you felt any of these feelings?	Not at all	Some days	More than half the days*	Nearly every day*
Little interest or pleasure in doing things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

\*If you answered "More than half the days" or "Nearly every day" to either question, please call Carelon Behavioral Health at **(855) 371-8117** right away. You can talk to someone about how you are feeling.

## Keep Track of Your Medicines

Make a list of all the prescription and non-prescription medicine you are taking right now. Bring this to your next PCP visit and show them your list.

### My medicines:

1	
2	
3	
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8	
9	

## Questions to Ask Your PCP

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

## Your Benefits

### Transportation

If you need help with transportation to your health visits, you can get a ride at no cost. Call SFHP Customer Service at **1(415) 547-7800** for more information.



### Ketone Strips

You can get ketone urine-testing strips with Medi-Cal at no cost. These strips test the ketone levels in your urine. This can help you monitor your blood sugar and if it is getting too high.

## Resources



American Diabetes Association  
**1(800) 342-2383**  
**diabetes.org**



MedlinePlus  
National Institutes of Health  
**medlineplus.gov/diabetes.html**



American Heart Association  
Oakland office **1(510) 903-4050**  
**heart.org/diabetes**



MyPlate  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
**myplate.gov**



Association of Diabetes Care  
& Education Specialists  
**diabeteseducator.org**



National Institute of Diabetes and  
Digestive and Kidney Diseases  
**niddk.nih.gov/health-information/diabetes**



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
**1(800) 232-4636**  
**cdc.gov/diabetes**



San Francisco Health Plan Customer Service  
**1(415) 547-7800**  
SFHP Diabetes Education Materials  
**sfhp.org/wellness**

For more information call Customer Service at **1(415) 547-7800** or visit **sfhp.org/health-ed**  
24/7 Nurse Advice Line **1(877) 977-3397** | Talk to a doctor 24/7 **sfhp.org/teladoc**