

What is a Diabetes A1C Test ?

During the course of diabetes care, most patients have a special blood test done every three or four months. It is called the *hemoglobin A1C test*. The major benefit of the A1C test is that it provides a measure of how your blood glucose levels have averaged over the past two to three months, and so gives more of a “big picture” of your overall blood sugar control. The daily blood glucose checks that you do yourself gives you a measure of your blood glucose level *at that moment*, but daily blood glucose levels can fluctuate quite a bit. The value of the A1C test is that it provides an excellent measure of how your blood glucose levels have been over the past two or three months. The A1C test is extremely important for monitoring how well your diabetes is controlled.

The good news is, this is a very simple test to understand. It is reported as a small number, and should be below “7.” For most people with diabetes, the A1C should be between “6” and “7;” this would indicate good, consistent control. If your A1C number is lower than “6,” that is even better, but any reading below “7” is generally considered acceptable.

Many times, health care providers are too busy and/or patients simply don’t ask about their blood work. The purpose of this handout is to encourage you to take a more active role in your diabetes care. One very important factor in your diabetes care is for you to always ask your doctor, nurse, or diabetic counselor to inform you of your A1C number. They will be glad to share this important information with you.

Knowing your A1C number will enable you to know how your overall diabetic control is. Be sure to ask any member of your diabetes care team any questions that you may have about your care.

For more detailed information on the A1C test, go to: www.A1CNOW.com, or www.diabetes.org (or call 1-800-342-2383).

A final note: the retina within the eye is the only place in the body where blood vessels can easily be examined. Since diabetes primarily affects the blood vessels, it is very important to have a dilated eye examination every year. This is even more important if your A1C readings tend to be higher than “7.”