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## Do blood glucose test strips expire

Test strips, those tiny slips that our glucose meters use to transport a drop of blood to their reader, can be expensive. There are many brands of glucose meters, and generally each meter requires its own brand of test strips. Often, the meters are free, or at the very least, inexpensive. Of course, they require their own unique brand of strips, and that is where the money is made. The expense of testing strips, and the lack of insurance coverage for them, leads to thoughts of how to save money on them. For a well-controlled type 2 diabetic this might not be such a big deal, as testing might only be necessary once or twice a day. For type 1 diabetics, or those type 2s who struggle to maintain control, testing is likely needed many times a day. There have been several unofficial and anecdotal "experiments" done to see if it is possible to use expired strips and get accurate readings. A review of many of these web-published efforts has shown that the accuracy of the readings that come from using expired strips is, at best, a hit-or-miss result. Reusing strips has an even more dismal result, with few strips giving any reading at all on a second use, and virtually none giving an accurate reading. Tips for Keeping the Cost Down Rather than accepting a free or low-cost glucose meter and then being stuck with expensive test strips, shop the test strips first. There are low-cost or generic strips out there, and each brand will tell you which meters they are compatible with. A one-time meter purchase, no matter how expensive, can save you a great amount of money if the strips are less expensive. Know how many strips you need in a day, a week or a month. Buy accordingly. If you are testing your blood only twice each day, then you will need no more than 62 strips each month. If you are testing up to 10 times each day, then you might need as many as 300 strips per month. Strips come packaged in a number of different quantities. There may be 25 or 50 or 100 in a box. Don't buy more than you will use by the expiration date. This might require more frequent purchases, but you are more likely to have used them up than to have some that expire before use. Keep the strips in a dry, clean place where they won't be affected by dust, grease or dirt. Keep them at room temperature. Make sure your hands are clean when handling them so the remaining strips in the box are not contaminated. Make sure you are using the correct strips for the reader you have. The reader and the strips are designed to be used together, and mixing brands may produce inaccurate results. Most importantly, don't short yourself on testing. It is important that you do as much testing as you need to in order to control your blood sugar levels. Don't skimp. Sources: GlucoMart and Diabetes Mine Understanding the expiration dates of your testing supplies is an important part of maintaining your health as someone with diabetes. Welcome back to our weekly diabetes advice column, Ask D'Mine, hosted by veteran type 1, diabetes author and educator Wil Dubois.This week, Wil takes on a dual set of questions asking about expiration dates on those handy little strips we use to test our blood sugar levels — and whether there's really any need to respect the stamped-on expiration dates. Take a peek at what Wil has to say... as well as what one of the big strip-makers tells us. {Got your own questions? Email us at AskDMine@diabetesmine.com}Beth, type 1 from New York, writes: I have been on a "juvenile diabetic" since 1960 — when I was six years old. I have recently received 1600 glucose test strips for free. About 600 of them were expired. I did a little research, and decided that maybe the whole "expiration date" thing for test strips may not be true. I have been using these test strips for two months now. I occasionally test with my regular monitor and unexpired test strips to check the accuracy. Guess what? The results are the same -- maybe 5 points different. I have decided the expiration date on test strips is a ploy by the drug companies to suck us dry! Oh, yeah. The expiration dates were 2007 & 2008.But in the same week...Bob, type 1 from Sacramento, CA, writes: Over the last few days I have been getting higher than normal readings; 165-325 for no apparent reason. I noticed that my test strips "expired" 4 months ago... could this be the cause of my high readings? Thanks for any help!Wil@Ask D'Mine answers: Excuse me while I stroll out onto a mine field here... Nothing in diabetes is more controversial than test strips. Their cost, their accuracy, their availability. Even their effectiveness as part of therapy. But as much as I usually enjoy healing a dead horse, today I'm going to avoid all of those hot-button topics and just focus on the issue of test strip lifespans.First and foremost (new word alert!), regardless of the expiration date, test strips really do expire at some point. Second and foremost, that date may not be the one printed on the carton.Let me explain.Strips expire. Honestly, they do. Not that I wouldn't put it past Big Pharma to engage in "a ploy to suck us dry," but in this case, the facts are that the magical little enzymes and chemicals that make test strips work really do break down over time. A test strip is more animal and vegetable than machine, and any test strip that's old enough will eventually give you bad information.But is that point of bad information really the printed expiration date? The vial of Verio strips on my desk says it expires 08/2014. Does that really mean I'd get a good reading using one August 31st and a bad reading on September 1st? Of course not. That's ridiculous. But what if I tried to stretch it to the middle of September? Or into October? Or into 2015 or even into 2016? Frankly, I don't know. No one knows, or if they do, they are paid well to keep their traps shut. And as our two readers above demonstrate, it's probably not just as simple as the age of the strip. Beth is happy with the results of years-old strips and Bob seems to be having issues with months-old strips.There are other factors afoot.Looking outside diabetes for a moment, I've been known to try to yank a carton of milk out of the back of the rack in the grocery store refrigerator in hope of getting a fresher one, because, as we all know, milk has a limited shelf life. Beyond that point, a process of decay sets in. First, it gradually turns sour, then it develops a foul odor. Next it gets chunky, then it grows brown, green, or pink mold (really) and eventually it turns into Limburger cheese (not really).Just now I went into my kitchen and checked out our Wal-Mart Organic 2% milk. It has an expiration date, but there's also a note saying that the product should be consumed within seven days of opening. Presumably, if you opened the container eleven days before expiration date, you'd still only get the seven days. So there are two clocks ticking with milk. One counts down spoilage in a pristine unopened container and the other counts down spoilage in a container that has been opened. Some brands of milk probably last longer than others. How far you need to transport the milk between buying it and getting it home to your fridge no doubt has a role to play in how long it lasts, as does the temperature in your part of the country and what time of year it is. 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