Fingerstick Test and Alternate Site Test Techniques

**Fingerstick:** Wash hands with soap and water. Stick the finger on the side of the fingertip (you can do it on the fingertip, but, since we use our fingertips to write, grab, work... it will make it more sensitive). Don’t squeeze the finger, but, you can use your other hand gently squeeze the hand in a downward motion all the way to the fingertip. Place the blood drop on the strip and wait for your results. If you have a difficult time getting enough blood, use warm wet towels to soak your hand for a couple of minutes before you perform your test or adjust your lancet device to have a deeper penetration.

**Alternate Site Testing:**

*Alternative site* refers to testing blood glucose on parts of the body other than the fingertip: most commonly the forearm, palm or thigh.

Testing somewhere other than the finger may bring a sigh of relief to many people with diabetes.
However, alternative test sites are not all the same.

With all meters, routine testing on an unrubbed forearm, upper arm, thigh or calf gives a test result that is 20 to 30 minutes old.

We will call these sites 'lagging' alternative test sites.

The fingertips and the palm hold the most recent 'memories' of your blood glucose. Fingertip and palm testing tell you what your blood glucose level is right now.

On the other hand, lagging test sites such as the forearm or thigh tell you what your blood glucose was around 20 to 35 minutes ago - not what it is right now. That difference can be crucial if your blood glucose is dropping fast --- a forearm test might tell you that the level is fine, because the forearm is a lagging test site, while a fingertip test correctly alerts you to a low number. Because of this, lagging test sites cannot replace the fingertip or palm completely for any person.

Several monitoring companies give people the choice to test their blood glucose using alternative sites. However, lagging test sites such as the forearm or thigh are only reliable when your blood glucose levels are relatively stable, such as fasting blood glucose.

So when is alternative site testing not recommended? The U.S. Food and Drug Administration give these guidelines:

1. People with hypoglycemia unawareness should not use alternative site testing at all.

2. Don't use alternative sites when a seriously low blood glucose might go undetected:

   - When you have just taken insulin, or any time during or after exercise.
   - When there are unknown variables occurring in your day, such as illness.
   - Any time you just feel "low".
   - Whenever you are about to drive.
Talk to your doctor to see if alternative site testing is right for you. With a little bit of education, you can give your fingertips a rest and maybe test more often than you do now. For people with diabetes, more frequent testing is a good thing. Just remember: any time you want to be sure of an accurate, up-to-date blood glucose reading, test on your fingertip or palm.

You may find that getting an adequate sample from another site other than the fingertip a little more difficult, so here are some tips to help with successful AST testing:

- Only use a meter recommended for AST (check the instruction manual to be sure)
- Use a lancet device suited to AST (such as Accu-Chek Softclix with AST cap)
- Dial up the highest number on your lancet device for the first try (remember it won't hurt nearly as much as a fingerprick)
- Vigorously rub the site to stimulate blood flow
- Lance the site but keep some pressure on it with the device until you see a drop of blood start to form

It may take a few tests to get the technique right and you may want to do an AST and a fingerprick test at the same time just to compare results.

If you decide to use AST you should regularly make sure that your AST results match your fingerprick test results AND be sure the AST results confirm how you are feeling.

Until you discuss the suitability of AST with your healthcare professional, please continue to use only fingerprick test results.