

Problem Solving

Managing your diabetes and being healthy involves making decisions on a daily basis. The problems you face in keeping your blood glucose levels stable are often the most challenging. Hypoglycemia (low blood glucose), hyperglycemia (high blood glucose), and sick day decisions are some of the problems that require special knowledge and problem-solving skills.

Low Blood Glucose (Hypoglycemia)

When your blood glucose drops lower than is normal and healthy—usually below 70 mg/dl—this is hypoglycemia.

- Hypoglycemia happens more often if you take insulin or certain oral diabetes medications such as glipizide (Glucotrol) glyburide (DiaBeta), glimiperamide (Amaryl), rapaglinide (Prandin) or nateglinide (Starlix).
- Exercise, which lowers blood glucose naturally, can also lead to hypoglycemia.

Causes of Hypoglycemia

- Too much insulin or medication.
- Skipping or delaying meals or snacks—or eating less than usual.
- Exercising strenuously without consuming extra carbohydrates or adjusting insulin dosages.
- Vomiting and/or diarrhea during an illness.
- Drinking too much alcohol, especially without eating food.

Preventing Hypoglycemia

- Match your insulin dose to the amount of carbohydrates you eat. Your health care provider can help you learn how to do this accurately.
- Test your blood glucose more often during exercise and times of stress.
- If you drink alcohol, limit yourself to one or two servings, and always eat some carbohydrates at the same time.
- If you are sick, test your blood glucose levels every two to four hours—or at least four times per day.
- Always carry a source of sugar with you. (See examples on page 25.)
- Wear medical identification (bracelet, necklace or a wallet card) that states you have diabetes.

Low Blood Glucose and Driving

Protect yourself and others by driving only when your glucose is in a safe range.

- Check your blood glucose before driving.
- Do not drive if your blood glucose is low or if you have any symptoms of hypoglycemia.
- When driving or traveling, always carry your glucose meter and have glucose tablets or gel near you.

Treatment for Hypoglycemia

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How to Treat Mild and Moderate Hypoglycemia (Rule of 15)

Test your blood glucose level. If your blood glucose level is low, **take 15 grams of carbohydrates** such as:

- Three to four glucose tablets.*
- One tube of glucose gel.*
- Liquid glucose such as Dex4 Glucose Liquid Blast®*
- ½ cup (4 ounces) of fruit juice
- ½ cup (4 ounces) of regular (not sugar-free) soda
- 1 cup (8 ounces) of skim milk
- Six to eight Life Savers® or SweetTarts®
- 15 Skittles® or Jelly Belly® jelly beans
- Small piece of fruit
- 1 Tbsp. sugar, jam, honey, or syrup

After **15 minutes**, test your blood glucose again. If your glucose level is still low, **take 15 more grams of carbohydrates**. Once your blood glucose level is in a normal range, eat a light snack, if it will be more than one hour before your next meal.

* These are available without a prescription at drugstores.

How to Treat Severe Low Blood Glucose

Talk to your family and friends about the possibility of hypoglycemia. Let them know that if you become unresponsive or unconscious or cannot swallow for any reason, they should call 911.

If you have a glucagon injection kit, show them how to use it. Instruct them to position you on your side when administering the glucagon injection, in case you vomit.

A glucagon injection kit requires a health care provider's prescription. Patients who are at high risk for hypoglycemia reactions should always carry one.

Symptoms of Low Blood Glucose**

Mild Hypoglycemia

- Sudden hunger
- Headache
- Shaking
- Fast or pounding heartbeat
- Sweating
- Tiredness
- Dizziness
- Blurred vision
- Nervousness, excitement
- Drowsiness
- Numbness or tingling around mouth and lips

Moderate Hypoglycemia

- Personality change
- Irritability
- Confusion
- Poor coordination
- Difficulty concentrating
- Slurred or slow speech

Severe Hypoglycemia

- Unconsciousness
- Seizures

** Note: You may feel all, some, or none of these signs and symptoms. Some medications such as beta-blockers, which are used to control blood pressure, may make it difficult to recognize the symptoms of hypoglycemia.