

What is Hypoglycemia (Low Blood Sugar)?

What is hypoglycemia?

Hypoglycemia, or low blood sugar, is a condition that may occur in individuals taking insulin or certain oral medications to treat diabetes. In the past, hypoglycemia was referred to as an “insulin reaction” or “insulin shock.”

What does hypoglycemia feel like?

Common symptoms of hypoglycemia include:

- Anxiety
- Shakiness
- Rapid heartbeat
- Sweating
- Fatigue or tiredness
- Dizziness
- Irritability
- Hunger

Symptoms can occur suddenly, but usually preceded by subtle “warning signs.” Not everyone experiences all of the symptoms mentioned. Symptoms of hypoglycemia may change over time. If you have questions about your symptoms or change in your symptoms, discuss this with your physician.



What can I do to prevent hypoglycemia?

Hypoglycemia generally occurs when there is a mismatch between medications for diabetes, food and physical activity. The following ways help to minimize hypoglycemia from occurring:

1. Eat your planned meals and snacks regularly. Avoid skipping or delaying meals and snacks.
2. Eat more at meals or snacks if your physical activity is greater than usual.
3. Discuss with your healthcare team adjustment of insulin doses when doing more exercise.

Discuss with your physician oral medication dose changes particularly if you lose weight, eat less than usual or increase your physical activity significantly.

How do I treat hypoglycemia?

First, if possible, use your glucometer to test your blood sugar level. Hypoglycemia is considered a reading less than 70, unless your physician has instructed you to use a different cut-off point. If it is not possible to check your

blood sugar level and you are experiencing the symptoms of hypoglycemia, **treat the symptom(s)**. The "15-15 Rule" for treatment of hypoglycemia is outlined below. Discuss these instructions with your physician at your next appointment.

The recommended treatment for hypoglycemia is the 15-15 rule:

Eat or drink **15 grams** of fast-acting carbohydrate:

- 3-4 glucose tabs *or*
- 4 ounces fruit juice *or*
- 8 ounces skim milk *or*
- 6-8 Lifesavers

Wait **15 minutes** and recheck your blood sugar.

When your blood sugar is above 70, have a light snack (such as ½ sandwich) if it will be more than 45 minutes until your next meal or regular snack.

If blood sugar is still lower than 70 (or your physician's cut-off), repeat the **15 grams** of carbohydrate, wait **15 minutes** and recheck your blood sugar.

Be Careful! Drinking or eating more than recommended will not raise blood sugar more rapidly, but may raise it too high.

If blood sugar is still lower than 70 (or your physician's cut-off), call your physician or 911.

Notes:

Sources:

American Diabetes Association @ www.diabetes.org
American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists @ www.aace.com

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