

# Fact Sheet



Division of Developmental Disabilities Health Care Services

## Hypoglycemia

Hypoglycemia is low blood sugar. Blood sugar levels change often during the day. When they drop below 70 mg/dL, this is called having low blood sugar. At this level, you need to take action to bring it back up. Low blood sugar is especially common in people with type 1 diabetes.

*Fact Sheet guidelines have been provided as general information, not as a substitution for medical treatment from a physician.*

### Causes:

There are many reasons why you may have low blood sugar, including:

- Taking too much insulin
- Not eating enough carbohydrates for how much insulin you take
- Timing of when you take your insulin
- The amount and timing of physical activity
- Drinking alcohol
- How much fat, protein, and fiber are in your meal
- Hot and humid weather
- Unexpected changes in your schedule
- Spending time at a high altitude
- Going through puberty
- Having your period (menstruation)

### Symptoms:

How you react to low blood sugar may not be the same as it is for others. It's important to know your symptoms. Common symptoms may include:

- Fast heartbeat
- Shaking
- Sweating
- Nervousness or anxiety
- Irritability or confusion
- Dizziness
- Hunger

You may have more *serious* symptoms as your low blood sugar gets worse, including:

- Feeling weak
- Having trouble walking or seeing clearly
- Acting strange or feeling confused
- Having seizures

### Hypoglycemia unawareness:

You may not have any symptoms when your blood sugar is low. It will be harder to treat your low blood sugar early if you don't have symptoms. This increases your risk of having severe lows and can be dangerous. This is more likely to happen if you:

- Have had diabetes for more than 5–10 years
- Often have low blood sugar
- Take certain medicines, such as beta blockers to treat high blood pressure

If you have hypoglycemia unawareness, check your blood sugar more often. Checking is especially important to do before driving or being physically active.

# Hypoglycemia



## Prevention:

One of the best ways to prevent low blood sugar is to frequently monitor. This can help you to notice trends and adjust before your blood sugar drops too low. Share your blood sugar, medicine routine, physical activity, and food patterns with your doctor if you continue to have low blood sugar episodes. They may be able to identify patterns and help prevent lows by making adjustments. Do not make any changes to your medicines without talking to your doctor.

## Treatment for Low Blood Sugar:

The 15-15 rule:

- Have 15 grams of carbs, then wait 15 minutes.
- Check your blood sugar again. If it's still less than 70 mg/dL, repeat this process.
- Keep repeating these steps until your blood sugar is back up in your target range.
- After treating your low blood sugar, eat a balanced snack or meal with protein and carbs.

*Tips to keep in mind:*

- *It is important to have friends, family, co-workers, or other people around often that know what to do in a hypoglycemic situation because it can be sudden and severe, so acting fast is key.*
- *Young children may need less than 15 grams of carbs, especially infants and toddlers. Ask your doctor how much your child needs.*
- *Check your blood sugar often when lows are more likely, such as when the weather is hot or when you travel.*

*Foods to treat low blood sugar:*

When treating low blood sugar, you need to absorb sugars as quickly as possible by using fast-acting carbs. Be sure to always have at least one of the items at home and with you just in case your blood sugar is too low:

- 4 ounces ( $\frac{1}{2}$  cup) of juice or regular (non-diet) soda.
- 1 tablespoon of sugar, honey, or syrup
- Hard candies, jellybeans, or gumdrops
- 3-4 glucose tablets (follow instructions from your doctor)
- 1 dose of glucose gel (usually 1 tube; follow instructions from your doctor)

Foods high in fiber (such as fruit, beans, lentils) and foods high in fat (such as chocolate, baked goods) can slow down how fast you can absorb sugars and are not good options when treating low blood sugar.

## Treatment for Severe Low Blood Sugar:

Your blood sugar is considered severely low if it is below 55 mg/dL. You may not be able to treat it using the 15-15 rule. You also may not be able to check your own blood sugar or treat it by yourself, depending on your symptoms.

Injectable glucagon is the best way to treat severely low blood sugar. A glucagon kit is available by prescription. Speak with your doctor to see if you should have a kit, and make sure you know how to use it.

## Emergency

Call 9-1-1 for emergency medical treatment *immediately* after a glucagon injection.