

Hypoglycemia

Blood glucose less than 70 mg/dL

This handout explains what hypoglycemia is, what causes it, common symptoms, and what to do if you have it. It also gives a list of quick-acting carbohydrates to treat hypoglycemia.

What is hypoglycemia?

Hypoglycemia is low blood sugar (glucose), usually less than 70 mg/dL. It occurs most often in people who take insulin. It can also occur in people who take a medicine that makes their pancreas release more insulin.

Your ideal blood glucose targets depend on your age, if you have heart disease, or if you cannot tell when your blood sugar is low. Ask your diabetes care provider for your blood glucose targets.

Tell your provider if your blood glucose level is often less than 70 mg/dL. You may need to have your medicine adjusted.

Symptoms of Hypoglycemia

- Feeling shaky and/or sweaty
- Nausea
- Extreme hunger
- Confusion, not able to think clearly
- Heart pounding or racing
- Blurred vision
- Having no energy
- Feeling “not right”



Causes

Some causes of hypoglycemia are:

- Eating too little or delaying a meal
- Taking extra diabetes medicine
- Unplanned or extra physical activity
- Drinking alcohol, especially on an empty stomach

Check your blood glucose if you are not sure if your levels are low.

If You Think You Have Hypoglycemia

Remember the “**Rule of 15**”:

1. Check your blood glucose. If your blood glucose level is:

What should someone do if a loved one passes out from hypoglycemia?

- **Call 911.**
- Do **not** try to give the person anything by mouth.
- If you have a glucagon kit and know how to use it, you may give the person glucagon.

- Less than 70 mg/dL: Treat with 15 grams of carbohydrate.
- Less than 50 mg/dL: Treat with 30 grams of carbohydrate.

2. Check your blood glucose again after 15 minutes.
3. If your blood glucose level is still less than 70 mg/dL, repeat treatment.
4. Once your blood glucose returns to normal, eat a small snack with protein if your next meal is more than 1 hour away. This snack could be a slice of cheese and 4 to 6 crackers or a small peanut butter sandwich.

Cautions About Driving

- **Always check your blood glucose before driving.** Hypoglycemia can be very dangerous if it occurs while you are driving.
- If your blood glucose is under ____ mg/dL, eat a snack before you drive.

Quick Sources of 15 Grams of Carbohydrate

This table gives food sources to treat hypoglycemia quickly. Do **NOT** treat hypoglycemia with high-fat foods such as chocolate, cookies, or ice cream. Fat slows how quickly your body can use the carbohydrates in the food.

| Carbohydrate Source | Amount | Carbohydrate | Calories |
|---|-----------|----------------|----------|
| Glucose Tablets* 1 tablet = about 4 grams carbohydrate; check the label | 4 tablets | 16 grams | 60 |
| Fruit Juice | ½ cup | 15 grams | 60 |
| Soft Drinks (not diet) | ½ can | 20 grams | 70 |
| Sugar 1 tsp. = 4 grams carbohydrate | 1 Tbsp. | 12 grams | 40 |
| Sport Drinks | 1 cup | 15 grams | 60 |
| Milk, nonfat | 1 cup | 12 grams | 90 |
| Milk, 1% | 1 cup | 12 grams | 105 |
| Lifesavers 1 piece = 2.5 grams carbohydrate | 6 pieces | 15 grams | 60 |
| Sweet Tarts* 1 piece = 1.7 grams carbohydrate | 8 | 14 grams | 60 |
| Chewy Sweet Tarts* 1 piece = 0.5 grams carbohydrate | 30 | 15 grams | 60 |
| Skittles 1 piece = 0.9 grams carbohydrate | 15 | 15 grams | 60 |
| Fruit Roll-Ups 1 roll = ½ ounce; check the label | 1 | 12 to 15 grams | 50 to 75 |
| Raisins | 2 Tbsp. | 15 grams | 60 |

** The first ingredient in these items is dextrose. This type of sugar raises blood glucose more quickly than other sugars.*

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

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