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Recognising and Managing Low Blood Sugar

A practical guide to recognising, treating and preventing hypoglycaemia

Low blood sugar, or **hypoglycaemia**, can occur in people taking insulin or certain glucose-lowering medicines. Recognising and treating it promptly is important.

What Is Low Blood Sugar?

A glucose level **below 70 mg/dL** is considered hypoglycaemia and should be treated promptly.

A glucose level **below 54 mg/dL** is a more significant low and requires immediate attention.

Severe hypoglycaemia refers to an episode in which a person is unable to treat themselves and requires help from someone else.

Recognising the Symptoms

Symptoms can vary from person to person and may include:

- Shakiness or trembling
- Sweating
- Hunger
- Palpitations
- Dizziness or light-headedness
- Weakness
- Irritability or unusual behaviour
- Difficulty concentrating
- Confusion
- Blurred vision

Some people, particularly those who have experienced diabetes or recurrent hypoglycaemia for a long time, may have **few or no warning symptoms**.

What to Do When Your Glucose Is Below 70 mg/dL

If you are **awake and able to swallow safely**:

1. Take 15 grams of fast-acting carbohydrate

Examples include:

- 3–4 glucose tablets, depending on the product
- Glucose gel providing approximately 15 g glucose



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- ½ cup (approximately 120 mL) fruit juice
- 1 tablespoon sugar or honey

2. Wait 15 minutes

Avoid repeatedly eating during this period unless your symptoms are worsening.

3. Check your glucose again

If it is **still below 70 mg/dL**, take another 15 grams of fast-acting carbohydrate and recheck after another 15 minutes.

4. Once your glucose has recovered

If your next meal is not due soon, you may need a snack containing carbohydrate and protein to help reduce the chance of another low.

Choose the Right Treatment

When treating hypoglycaemia, you need something that can raise glucose relatively quickly.

Foods containing significant amounts of **fat or fibre**, such as chocolate, biscuits or some desserts, are not ideal first choices because they can slow glucose absorption.

Keep an appropriate fast-acting glucose source easily accessible, particularly if you use insulin or have previously experienced hypoglycaemia.

Why Does Hypoglycaemia Happen?

Common triggers can include:

- Taking more insulin or glucose-lowering medication than required
- Delaying or missing a meal
- Eating less carbohydrate than usual
- More physical activity than anticipated
- Alcohol consumption
- Changes in routine, illness or appetite

Sometimes recurrent hypoglycaemia indicates that your diabetes treatment needs to be reviewed.

Severe Hypoglycaemia: Know What to Do

If a person with suspected hypoglycaemia is **unconscious, having a seizure, severely confused or unable to swallow safely**:

Do not give food or liquids by mouth.

Glucagon should be administered if it has been prescribed and is available, by someone who knows how to use it.



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Seek emergency medical assistance immediately.

People using insulin or at high risk of severe hypoglycaemia should discuss whether they need glucagon available at home and ensure that family members or caregivers know when and how to use it.

Preventing Future Lows

If you experience hypoglycaemia:

- Record the glucose level and time of the episode
- Note when you last ate
- Record your recent insulin or medication dose
- Consider whether physical activity was different from usual
- Look for repeated patterns
- Discuss recurrent or unexplained episodes with your treating doctor

Do not routinely reduce or stop your diabetes medicines on your own because of a single episode. Your treatment may need individualized review.

Be Prepared

If you are at risk of hypoglycaemia, consider carrying:

Glucose source | Glucose meter/CGM | Medical identification | Glucagon, if prescribed

Family members or people you spend significant time with should also know how to recognise severe hypoglycaemia and what to do.

Quick Takeaway

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⚠️ HYPOGLYCAEMIA ACTION PLAN ⚠️

BELOW 70 → 15 g → WAIT 15 MIN → RECHECK



BELOW 70 mg/dL

Check your glucose.
If below 70 mg/dL,
take action.



TAKE 15 g

Consume 15 g of
fast-acting carbohydrate.
Examples: glucose tablets,
juice (½ cup), sugar,
honey, or regular soda.



WAIT 15 MIN

Wait for 15 minutes
to allow your glucose
to rise.



RECHECK

Recheck your glucose.
If still below 70 mg/dL,
repeat the steps.



For most adults who can safely swallow, **15 g of fast-acting carbohydrate** followed by a glucose check after **15 minutes** is a simple way to remember the initial treatment of hypoglycaemia.



Recurrent lows, glucose below 54 mg/dL, reduced awareness of hypoglycaemia or any episode requiring another person's assistance should prompt review of your diabetes treatment.



*This guide provides general educational information.
Your individual hypoglycaemia plan may differ according to your diabetes treatment and medical needs.*

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