

## Living Well With Diabetes - Low Blood Sugar

### What is low blood sugar?

Low blood sugar or hypoglycemia (usually a blood sugar level less than 4 mmol/L) can occur when medication, food, and exercise are out of balance. Low blood sugar can be mild, moderate, or severe.

### How can I prevent low blood sugar?

Low blood sugar can usually be prevented:

- by being careful to take your correct medication dose
- by eating meals on time and not skipping meals
- by taking a fast acting source of simple sugar (such as glucose tablets, fruit juice, regular pop, or hard candies) if your blood sugar level before exercising is below 5.0 mmol/L; make sure you check your blood sugar during and several hours after exercising as well.

*Drinking alcohol can make blood sugar levels fall too low. Discuss the use of alcohol with your doctor.*

### How do I know I have low blood sugar? What should I do?

If low blood sugar does occur, you must treat it quickly. If possible, test your blood sugar level before treating, but if you can't test, treat anyway – it is better to be safe.

DEGREE OF LOW BLOOD SUGAR	SYMPTOMS	TREATMENT
Mild	Trembling or shaking, rapid heart beat, sweating, anxiety, hunger, nausea, tingling	Take 15 grams of carbohydrate such as : 3 glucose tablets (B-D brand) 5 dextrose tablets (Dextrosol) ¾ cup fruit juice or regular pop
Moderate	As above, plus unable to concentrate, confusion, weakness, drowsiness, dizziness, feeling tired, headache, difficulty speaking, vision changes	3 hard candies 4 teaspoons sugar Wait for 15 minutes and repeat treatment if blood sugar remains below 4.0 mmol/L.
Severe, but conscious (Blood sugar usually less than 2.8 mmol/L)	As above, but symptoms will have progressed so you need the help of others to treat your low blood sugar	Take 20 grams of carbohydrate such as : 4 glucose tablets (B-D brand) 7 dextrose tablets (Dextrosol) 1 cup fruit juice or regular pop 4 hard candies 5 teaspoons sugar Wait for 15 minutes and repeat treatment if blood sugar remains below 4.0 mmol/L.
Severe, unconscious	As above, but symptoms have progressed to unconsciousness.	Emergency services must be contacted. May be treated with glucagon injections.

This information is not meant to replace the medical counsel of your doctor or individual consultation with a registered dietitian. This information may only be used in its entirety.



*People with diabetes that take acarbose (Prandase) in combination with insulin or oral agents must treat low blood sugar with glucose tablets, or, if these are not available, drink milk. If taking this combination of medications, foods sweetened with table sugar (sucrose) will not bring blood sugar levels up.*

### **What should I do after treating my low blood sugar?**

After any episode of low blood sugar, if a meal is more than 1 hour away, always follow the treatment with a snack such as a slice of bread with a slice of meat or cheese or a tablespoon of peanut butter (equal to 15 grams of carbohydrate and a protein source).

Discuss low blood sugar episodes with your doctor; they may signal a need for a change in diabetes medication or insulin dose.

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