



How to Treat Low Blood Sugar

When you have diabetes, hypoglycemia means you have low blood sugar (glucose). A low blood sugar level is below 70 mg/dL. Glucose is an important sugar. The cells of your brain, muscles, and many parts of the body need it for energy. If your brain cells don't get enough glucose, you can pass out.

Hypoglycemia can happen for many reasons. Know the signs of low blood sugar, how to treat it, and what you can do to prevent more serious symptoms.

Know the Symptoms

When you have low blood sugar, you may feel:

- Dizzy
- Sweaty
- Irritable/cranky
- Shaky
- Hungry
- Headache pain
- Nervous
- Fast heartbeat
- Sudden moodiness or behavior, such as crying for no reason
- Tingling sensation around the mouth and/or in fingers
- Something isn't right

When your blood sugar is low, you may also have:

- Pale skin color
- Clumsy or jerky movements

- Difficulty thinking clearly or reading
- Poor coordination
- Heavy breathing
- Seizures
- Slurred speech

Plan ahead

- Learn how to treat low blood sugar by following the 15/15 rule (see page 2).
- Call your doctor or diabetes specialist if your blood sugar is less than 60 mg/dL twice in one day.
- Always carry glucose tablets, gel, or other carbohydrate sources with you to treat low blood sugar.
- Wear medical identification such as a bracelet or tag. Always carry something with you to let people know you have diabetes.

Follow the 15/15 rule

Eat a carbohydrate (carb) source (15 grams) and wait 15 minutes to see if you feel better.

To use the 15/15 rule:

Step 1: If you feel symptoms of low blood sugar:

- Stop what you're doing immediately.
- Test your blood sugar.
- Go to **Step 2** if your blood sugar level is below 70 mg/dL.
- Start at **Step 2** if you can't test your blood sugar and have symptoms of low blood sugar.

Step 2: If your blood sugar is between 50 and 70 mg/dL, eat or drink one of the following carbohydrate sources. Each contains about 15 grams of carbs:

- 3 to 4 glucose tablets
- 1 tube of glucose gel
- 1 cup fruit juice
- 1 cup regular (not diet) soft drink
- 8 to 10 LifeSavers candies
- 3 teaspoons or 3 packets of sugar

If your blood sugar is less than 50 mg/dL, eat or drink 2 carb sources (30 grams).

Note: If you take miglitol (Glyset) you can only use glucose tablets to treat low blood sugar. Other carb sources won't work.



Step 3: Wait 15 minutes and then check your blood sugar level again.

- Repeat **Steps 2 and 3** if your blood sugar is still below 70 mg/dL after eating a carb source.
- Go to **Step 5** if your blood sugar level is rising up to between 80 and 140 mg/dL.

Step 4: Repeat **Steps 2 and 3** only one more time. **If you do these self-care steps 3 times** and your blood sugar is still below 70 mg/dL, **immediately call the Appointment and Advice Call Center at 1-866-454-8855.**

Step 5: If your blood sugar level is rising to between 80 and 130 mg/dL, and your next meal is an hour or more away, eat a small meal to help keep your blood sugar up. Try eating:

- Half of a small sandwich
- A small glass of low-fat milk and 2 graham crackers
- 6 to 7 whole-grain crackers and 1 ounce of cheese or peanut butter (the prepackaged kind work well)

Step 6: Figure out why your blood sugar was low.

Step 7: Plan how you will prevent low blood sugar in the future.

Learn more

Live Well With Diabetes:
kpdoc.org/diabetes



This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only. Some photos may include models and not actual patients.