Low blood sugar (Hypoglycemia)

What is low blood sugar?

Low blood sugar is when your blood sugar is less than 4.0 mmol/L. It is also called hypoglycemia. When you take insulin or some types of pills for diabetes, you are at risk of having a low blood sugar.

What causes low blood sugar?

- not eating at regular times or missing meals or snacks
- eating less carbohydrates than usual
- doing more exercise or activity than usual
- taking more diabetes medication or insulin than you need
- drinking alcohol (it can cause low blood sugar up to 24 hours after you drink)

What happens when your blood sugar is low?

- headache
- blurry eyesight
- hunger
- irritability
- sweating
- dizziness
- fast heartbeat
- shaking
- anxiety
- weakness, feeling tired

Ask your educator to discuss strategies for preventing low blood sugars
• If you have one or more of these symptoms, test your blood sugar to see if it is less than 4.0 mmol/L.

• If your blood sugar is less than 4.0 mmol/L, you need to treat it right away. If left untreated, your symptoms could get worse and you could pass out.

If you are not able to test your blood sugar, treat your symptoms right away.

How do I treat low blood sugar?

Step 1
• Stop what you are doing.
• Eat or drink 15 grams of fast-acting carbohydrate. Choose one of these:
  • 4 DEX4™ glucose tablets
  • 3 teaspoons, cubes or packets of table sugar (may be dissolved in water)
  • 3 teaspoons of honey
  • ¾ cup regular pop (not sugar free or diet)
  • ¾ cup fruit juice
  • 6-8 LifeSavers™

If you have Kidney Disease, choose one of the following treatments:

  • 4 DEX4™ glucose tablets (best choice, especially if you need to limit fluids)
  • 3 teaspoons of honey
  • 3 teaspoons, cubes or packets of table sugar
  • ¾ cup non-cola regular pop (not sugar free or diet)
  • 6-8 LifeSavers™
Step 2

- Sit down and rest for 10 to 15 minutes. Check your blood sugar level again.
- If your blood sugar is still less than 4.0 mmol/L or if the symptoms of low blood sugar do not go away after 15 minutes, repeat Step 1.
- If symptoms persist despite retreatment seek medical attention immediately.

If your next meal is more than one hour away, have a snack with a starch and protein. This will help maintain your blood sugar level until your next meal. For example:

- ½ cup of milk plus 2 plain cookies
- ½ cup of milk with ½ cup cereal
- 6 crackers with 1 oz cheese
- 1 slice of bread with 1 tablespoon peanut butter or 1 oz meat or cheese
- 1 granola bar

If you have been given specific dietary restrictions for Kidney Disease Management, please follow the serving guidelines provided by your dietitian.

If you have a low blood sugar just before a meal or snack, treat it as described in Steps 1 and 2 and then have your regularly planned meal or snack and medication.

1 teaspoon = 5 mL, 1 tablespoon = 15 mL, ½ cup = 125 mL, ¾ cup = 175 mL, 1 cup = 250 mL, 1 oz = 30 grams

- Talk to your health care provider if you have low blood sugars often.
- Always carry a source of fast-acting carbohydrate with you.
- If you drive, ask your educator for more information on driving and diabetes.