



# HYPOGLYCEMIA

## What is hypoglycemia?

Hypoglycemia, or low blood sugar, happens when blood glucose drops below normal levels, usually less than 70 mg/dL.<sup>1,2</sup>

Hypoglycemia can occur suddenly, but it can be treated by eating or drinking a small amount of glucose-rich food.<sup>1</sup>

If left untreated, hypoglycemia can lead to confusion, clumsiness, or fainting. In its most severe stage, hypoglycemia can lead to seizures, coma, and even death.<sup>1</sup>

**Remember that “hypoglycemia” is low blood sugar and should not be confused with “hyperglycemia,” which is high blood sugar.**

## Who is at risk for hypoglycemia?

Hypoglycemia may be a side effect of diabetes treatment, including insulin and oral medications that increase insulin production.<sup>1</sup>

It is, therefore, imperative for health care professionals and patients being treated for diabetes to be able to identify and also help manage hypoglycemia.<sup>3</sup>

**If the blood glucose reading is below 70 mg/dL, one of these quick-fix food items should be consumed immediately to raise blood glucose<sup>1</sup>:**

- 3 to 4 glucose tablets
- 1 serving of glucose gel—the amount equal to 15 grams of carbohydrate
- 1/2 cup (or 4 ounces) of a regular—not diet—soft drink
- 5 to 6 pieces of hard candy
- 1 cup (or 8 ounces) of milk
- 1 tablespoon of sugar or honey

Patients should then re-check their blood glucose 15 minutes after eating or drinking one of these quick-fix foods. If their blood glucose is still below 70 mg/dL, the normal limit, another serving of a quick-fix food should be eaten. Once the quick-fix food brings their blood glucose to 70 mg/dL, patients should eat a small snack if their next meal is 1 hour or more away.<sup>1</sup>

## Symptoms of hypoglycemia include<sup>2</sup>:

- Shakiness
- Nervousness or anxiety
- Sweating chills and clamminess
- Irritability or impatience
- Confusion
- Rapid heartbeat
- Lightheadedness or dizziness
- Hunger and nausea
- Sleepiness
- Blurred/impaired vision
- Tingling or numbness in the lips or tongue
- Headaches
- Weakness or fatigue
- Anger, stubbornness, or sadness
- Lack of coordination
- Nightmares or crying out during sleep
- Seizures
- Unconsciousness

## Hypoglycemia unawareness

Very often, people whose blood glucose level has fallen below 70 mg/dL may not feel any of the symptoms of hypoglycemia. This is referred to as “hypoglycemia unawareness.” Hypoglycemia unawareness occurs more frequently in people with type 1 diabetes, but it can occur in people with type 2 diabetes. People with hypoglycemia unawareness need to check their blood glucose regularly so they know when their blood glucose has fallen below 70 mg/dL.<sup>1</sup>

Patients should consult with their doctor if they think they are hypoglycemia unaware.

## Other impacts of hypoglycemia

The incidence of hypoglycemia is often measured in clinical trials; however, the data may not approximate true rates in real-world populations.<sup>4</sup>

Current research shows that the effects of hypoglycemia are already placing an economic burden on payers.<sup>4</sup>

With the Centers for Disease Control estimating that diabetes will be diagnosed in 1 of 3 people by the year 2050, management of complications associated with diabetes, such as hypoglycemia, will be of even greater concern in upcoming years.<sup>4</sup>

