Low Blood Glucose: The Basics

This handout will help you to learn the basics of low blood glucose: what it is, why it may happen, and what to do if it happens.

**What is low blood glucose?**

If your body does not have enough glucose, has too much insulin, or both, your blood glucose levels may be low. Less than 70 mg/dL is considered low blood glucose for most people.

Low blood glucose is also called **low blood sugar** or **hypoglycemia**.

**What causes low blood glucose in people with diabetes?**

Low blood glucose can be caused by:
- Medications you may be taking to treat diabetes
- Eating less than you normally do, not eating on time, or skipping a meal
- Exercising more than your normally do

People who have type 1 or type 2 diabetes can have low blood glucose.

**How will I know if my blood glucose is low?**

Although there may be times when no signs alert you to low blood glucose, be on the lookout for these signs if they do occur. Contact your healthcare provider if you are:
- Feeling shaky, dizzy, or anxious
- Confused or having trouble concentrating
- Having problems with your vision, such as blurry vision or seeing double
- Having heart palpitations
- Feeling a tingling sensation around your mouth

**What should I do if my blood glucose is low?**

1. Check your blood glucose.
2. If it is less than 70 mg/dL, take 15 grams of a carbohydrate, such as 4 glucose tabs, 2 ounces of glucose liquid or gel, or 4 ounces of orange juice.
3. Check your blood glucose again 15 minutes later.
4. If your blood glucose is still less than 70 mg/dL, take another 15 grams of a carbohydrate.
5. Once your blood glucose levels are back to normal, eat a meal or snack depending on the time of day to prevent another episode of low blood glucose.

These are some common mistakes people make when treating low blood glucose:
- If you don’t eat enough carbohydrate (for example, eating one hard candy), your blood glucose will stay low.
- If you eat too much carbohydrate (for example, eating hard candy and drinking orange juice and soda), your blood glucose will go very high.
- If you wait too long to treat low blood glucose, your blood glucose could fall to dangerous levels.

If you have questions about how to treat low blood glucose, be sure to talk with your healthcare provider.

**REFERENCES**


How many times per day do you usually check your blood glucose? And when?

Was your blood glucose below 70 mg/dL on any days during the last 2 weeks?

Did you have any signs of low blood glucose?

What did you do to treat your low blood glucose?

Write down any questions that you would like to ask your healthcare provider about blood glucose. Here are a few to get you started:

- What causes low blood glucose in people with diabetes?
- Low blood glucose can be caused by:
  - Medications you may be taking to treat diabetes
  - Eating less than you normally do, not eating on time, or skipping a meal
  - Exercising more than your normally do
- People who have type 1 or type 2 diabetes can have low blood glucose.

- What should I do if my blood glucose is low?
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  - If you wait too long to treat low blood glucose, your blood glucose could fall to dangerous levels.
- If you have questions about how to treat low blood glucose, be sure to talk with your healthcare provider.

The best times for me to check my blood glucose:

What is the best way for me to treat low blood glucose?