



Although people usually think about the long-term complications when it comes to diabetes, short-term or acute problems can also occur. Both low blood sugar levels (hypoglycemia) and high blood sugar levels (hyperglycemia) are acute problems.

What is a low blood sugar?

Usually, a blood sugar level of less than 70 mg/dL is considered too low and needs to be treated. Anything that lowers your blood sugar can cause hypoglycemia. Too much insulin, the wrong kind or dose of your diabetes pills, too much exercise, or too little food can cause your blood sugar to go too low.

How will I feel when my blood sugar is too low?

When your blood sugar is too low, you will feel certain symptoms. This is called a reaction. You might feel:

- Sweaty
- confused
- nervous
- anxious
- a fast heartbeat
- irritated
- weak
- headache
- hungry
- numb around nose/mouth

Sometimes other people notice you are having a reaction before you do. They might notice you are:

- irritable
- not thinking clearly
- slurring your words
- confused
- acting groggy/sleepy
- not sleeping well/having nightmares

Will I have all of these signs and symptoms?

Everyone has slightly different signs and feelings when their blood sugar is too low. You may have several of these symptoms or you may have different ones. You will usually have the same feelings each time you have a reaction.

Do these feelings always mean I am having a reaction?

You may have signs of a reaction when your blood sugar is coming down, even though your blood sugar is not below 70 mg/dL. This can also happen if your blood sugar has been high for a time. You can't always count on the way you feel to tell you if your blood sugar is really low. Checking your blood sugar is the only way to be sure.

Never drive when your blood sugar is low. Driving with a low blood sugar is just like driving drunk. If you feel as if you are having a reaction, pull over, treat the reaction and wait until your blood sugar is on target before you drive again.

How do I treat low blood sugar?

If your blood sugar is 50-70 mg/dL, take 15 grams of carbohydrate. If your blood sugar is less than 50 mg/dL, take 30 grams of carbohydrate. Wait 15 minutes and re-check your blood sugar. If your blood sugar is still less than 70 mg/dL, take another 15 grams of carbohydrate.

What to take	Amount (15 grams of carbohydrate)
Glucose tablets	3 to 4
Regular soft drinks	½ cup (4 ounces)
Orange or apple juice	½ cup (4 ounces)
Grape or cranberry juice	1/3 cup (3 ounces)
Milk (no fat or low-fat)	1 cup (8 ounces)
Raisins	2 tablespoons

Sugar packets	3 packets
Regular gelatin snack cup	3.5 ounces
Fruit cup in its own juice	4 ounces
Fruit roll-up	1 large roll

What should I do after a reaction?

Once you are sure the reaction is over, make a note in your record. Write down what your blood sugars were, the symptoms you felt, and how you treated the reaction. If you have two or more reactions in a week, call your doctor. Your medicines may need to be adjusted.

Whenever you have a reaction, ask yourself these questions:

1. What was I doing before the reaction?
2. What do I think caused the reaction?
3. Did the treatment work?
4. Was my blood sugar on target for the rest of the day after the reaction?

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