



Hypoglycemia, or low blood sugar, can happen for many reasons. By quickly recognizing the signs of low blood sugar, you can treat them and prevent more serious symptoms.

**H**ypoglycemia means that you have low levels of sugar (glucose) in the blood. A low blood sugar level is below 70 mg/dL. Glucose is an important sugar, since the cells of the brain, muscles, and many parts of the body use it for energy. If the brain cells do not get enough glucose, you can pass out.

## Check the symptoms you usually have

When you have low blood sugar (hypoglycemia), you may feel:

- dizzy
- sweaty
- irritable/ cranky
- shaky
- hungry
- headache
- nervous
- fast heart beat
- sudden moodiness or behavior changes, such as crying for no apparent reason
- tingling sensation around the mouth and/or in fingers
- general feeling that something is not right
- any other symptoms you tend to have when your blood sugar is low:

Also, you may have:

- pale skin color
- difficulty thinking clearly or reading
- heavy breathing
- slurred speech
- clumsy or jerky movements; poor coordination
- seizures

## Plan ahead

- ✓ Learn how to treat low blood sugar by using the self-care steps on the next page.
- ✓ If you experience a low blood sugar of less than 60 mg/dL twice in one day, call your doctor or health care professional.
- ✓ Teach your family members, friends, caretakers, or co-workers what they should do in case you are not able to treat yourself because you have become too confused, weak, or have passed out. They should call 911 or take you immediately to the nearest hospital.
- ✓ Always carry with you glucose tablets, gel, or other carbohydrate sources with you to treat low blood sugar. See suggestions on the next page.
- ✓ Wear medical identification such as a bracelet or dog tag. Always carry something with you that will let people know that you have diabetes.

## Steps to treat low blood sugar: the 15/15 rule

By eating a carbohydrate source (15 grams) and waiting 15 minutes to see if you feel better, you are following the 15/15 rule.

**Step 1:** If you feel symptoms of low blood sugar, immediately stop what you are doing. Test your blood sugar.

If your blood sugar level is below 70 mg/dL, go to **Step 2**.

If you are in a place where you cannot test your blood sugar and have symptoms of low blood sugar, start at **Step 2**.

**Step 2:** Eat or drink one of the following carbohydrate sources (15 grams) if your blood sugar is between 50 and 70 mg/dL.

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

Each serving of the foods or drinks listed below contains about 15 grams of carbohydrates:

- 3–4 glucose tablets
- 1 tube of glucose gel
- ½ cup of fruit juice
- ½ cup regular (not diet) soft drink
- 8–10 LifeSavers candies
- 3 teaspoons or 3 packets of sugar

**Note:** If you take miglitol (Glyset) you can only use glucose tablets to treat low blood sugar. Other carbohydrate sources will not work for you.

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

If your blood sugar is still below 70 mg/dL after eating a carb source, **repeat Steps 2 and 3**.

If your blood sugar level is rising up to between 80 and 140 mg/dL, **go to Step 5**.

**Step 4:** Repeat Steps 2 and 3 only one other time.

**If you do these self-care steps 3 times** and your sugars are still below 70 mg/dL, immediately call the Kaiser Permanente Appointment and Advice Line at 1-866-454-8855.

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

- half of a small sandwich
- a small glass of low-fat milk and 2 graham crackers
- 6–7 whole grain crackers and 1 ounce of cheese or peanut butter (the pre-packaged 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.

### Additional resources

- Connect to our website at [kp.org](http://kp.org) to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and more.
- Visit [kp.org/mydoctor/diabetes](http://kp.org/mydoctor/diabetes) for day-to-day tips and tricks on how to live well with diabetes.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.
- If you are hit, hurt, or threatened by a partner or spouse, this can seriously affect your health. There is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to [ndvh.org](http://ndvh.org).



If you have an emergency medical condition, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital.

An emergency medical condition is (1) a medical or psychiatric condition that manifests itself by acute symptoms of sufficient severity (including severe pain) such that you could reasonably expect the absence of immediate medical attention to result in serious jeopardy to your health or body functions or organs; or (2) active labor when there isn't enough time for safe transfer to a Plan hospital (or designated hospital) before delivery, or if transfer poses a threat to your (or your unborn child's) health and safety.

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.