

When You Don't Feel Your Low Blood Sugar: Hypoglycemia Unawareness

Most people have early warning symptoms to tell them when their blood sugar is low (hypoglycemia) such as hunger, shakiness, and sweating. However, some people may not feel these usual early warning symptoms. Instead, they may have more serious symptoms of low blood sugar like confusion, cloudy thinking, and odd behaviour. If the blood sugar is very low, the person can become unconscious. Not being able to sense or recognize a low blood sugar is called *hypoglycemia unawareness*.

Many people can see the return of these early warning symptoms within weeks to months by raising their average blood sugar and avoiding low blood sugars.

Tips to Manage Hypoglycemia Unawareness

- Test your blood sugar at least 4 times a day (before each meal and before bedtime snack). You may also want to test in the middle of the night. This will warn you if your blood sugar is low so that you can treat it.
- Test your blood sugar before driving a vehicle. Don't drive if your blood sugar is less than 6.0 mmol/L. Check your blood sugar every hour while driving on longer trips. Always have a fast-acting sugar and snacks on hand.
- Adjust your goal for blood sugar control to 6.0 to 10.0 mmol/L before meals until you have made a plan with your doctor and/or diabetes educator. This will give you some extra room before your blood sugar becomes too low. This means that you must take action (e.g., adjust exercise, meals, or your insulin) if your blood sugar is below 6.0 or above 10.0 mmol/L.
- Try to have meals and snacks on time. If you're late for a meal, eat a snack that contains carbohydrates (e.g., fruit, juice, a starch, or milk) every 30 minutes until you can have your meal.
- Always have a snack before bed. Make sure your snack has at least 15 grams of carbohydrate and some protein. If you have alcohol at supper or in the evening, double your bedtime snack.
- Have a snack that has carbohydrates before any extra exercise. Also have a snack after exercising if it's not yet mealtime. If you've had a very active day or have exercised in the evening, double your bedtime snack.

- Be aware that your low blood sugar warning signs may have changed. The only symptoms you may have are trouble concentrating, poor coordination, feeling sleepy, or slurred speech. If you notice these symptoms, treat with some fast-acting sugar right away.

Treating Low Blood Sugar

Always carry fast-acting sugar with you.

1. Treat low blood sugars (less than 4 mmol/L) right away with at least 20 to 25 grams of fast-acting sugar, even if you don't feel any symptoms.

Examples of 20 to 25 grams of fast-acting sugar are:

- 1 juice box (200 mL)
 - 5 to 6 Dex4[®] tablets
 - ½–¾ can of regular pop (178–266 mL)
 - 10 Lifesaver[®] candies
2. Test your blood sugar again 15 minutes after treatment.
 3. If your blood sugar is less than the new target of 6 mmol/L, treat with another 20 to 25 grams of fast-acting sugar. Repeat until your blood sugar is over 6 mmol/L.
 4. Once your blood sugar is over 6 mmol/L eat a snack if your usual meal is more than 1 hour away.

Teaching Your Family and Friends

Make sure your family and friends know:

- your symptoms of low blood sugar, as they may notice changes before you do
- to treat your low blood sugar by giving you a fast-acting sugar
- how to give you glucagon (talk to your doctor or diabetes educator if you don't have glucagon)
- to call 9-1-1 if they need help or if you become unconscious due to the low blood sugar

This material is for information purposes only. It should not be used in place of medical advice, instruction, and/or treatment. If you have questions, speak with your doctor or appropriate healthcare provider.