

TREATMENT OF HYPOGLYCEMIA – PATIENT INFORMATION

LOW BLOOD SUGAR (HYPOGLYCEMIA)

If you have a low blood sugar (below 60-70) you may develop symptoms – including shakiness, sweating, hunger, irritability, and tiredness. If you develop these symptoms or think you have low blood sugar for any other reason, you should take steps to test your blood sugar and treat it if it is low. It is a good idea to always keep a source of rapid-acting carbohydrate available (for example, keep glucose tablets or juice boxes in your desk at work and in the glove compartment of your car).

TREATING HYPOGLYCEMIA (LOW BLOOD SUGAR)

If you develop symptoms of low blood sugar, you should take the following steps:

1. *Check your blood sugar.* If you do not think you can check your blood sugar before eating, check your blood sugar as soon as you are able.
2. *If the blood sugar is below 70, eat 15 grams of rapid-acting carbohydrate.* Example of foods that contain about 15 grams of carbohydrate and work rapidly are:
 - 4 ounces (½ cup) of juice or soda (not diet soda)
 - 3-4 glucose tablets
 - 1-2 teaspoons of sugar or honey
 - 1 cup of skim or 2% milk
 - 2 tablespoons of raisins
 - 5 lifesavers*If your blood sugar is below 40 or is dropping rapidly, you should initially consume 30 grams of carbohydrate (twice the amount listed above).*
3. *Recheck your blood sugar in 15 minutes.* It is important that you confirm your blood sugar rises to above 70, as sometimes it takes more than one treatment to correct the low blood sugar.
4. *If your blood sugar is still below 70, repeats steps 2 and 3.* That is, eat another 15 grams of carbohydrate and recheck your blood sugar in another 15 minutes. Keep repeating these steps until the blood sugar is at least 70.
5. *Once your blood sugar is above 70, resume your normal diabetes treatment and meals.* If your next meal more than one hour away, have a snack with starch and protein such as 1) crackers and peanut butter or cheese, 2) ½ of a ham or turkey sandwich, or 3) crackers or cereal with a cup of skim or 2% milk.
6. *Call your doctor if you are having frequent problems with low blood sugar or have other questions about treating low blood sugar.*

SPECIAL NOTES – SYMPTOMS OF HYPOGLYCEMIA WITH NORMAL OR HIGH BLOOD SUGAR

If you have had high blood sugar values for several weeks, your body will adapt and “get used to” high blood sugars. When the blood sugar is then treated to return it to normal levels, symptoms of low blood sugar can occur – even with normal blood sugar levels (blood sugar 70 or higher). *This condition is not dangerous and does not require treatment*, as long as the blood sugar stays above 60. In fact, it is best to try not to treat these symptoms as much as possible. This will allow the body to “reset” and eventually these symptoms will not occur with normal blood sugar values anymore. If you *must* eat because the symptoms are too severe, try to eat as little as possible to make the symptoms tolerable (try 10-15 grams of carbohydrate or less – see the list above). If you always eat enough to return the blood sugar levels to high values, the symptoms with normal sugar values will not go away, and you will not be able to have good control of your blood sugar.

SPECIAL NOTES – HYPOGLYCEMIA UNAWARENESS

If you have had frequent low blood sugar reactions, you may not develop typical symptoms (a condition called hypoglycemia unawareness) and instead develop confusion, slurred speech, and drowsiness. Hypoglycemia unawareness can be dangerous, because confusion may keep you from treating the low blood sugar appropriately. This can allow the low blood sugar to progress and result in serious problems like passing out or having seizures. If you think you have hypoglycemia unawareness, please discuss this with your doctor. For people who are at risk for having low blood sugar they cannot treat without help, a medicine called glucagon may be useful. By injecting glucagon (which comes in an “emergency kit”), a spouse/partner/friend/coworker can help to bring the sugar level back up to normal when the person with diabetes is unable or unwilling to eat carbohydrate.