

Low Blood Sugar Do's

By Hope Warshaw, MMSc, RD, CDE, diabetes educator, consultant, and Coordinator of the Perrigo Diabetes Care advisory board; and Riva Greenberg, diabetes patient-expert, author, speaker, and Huffington Post columnist.

There's never a convenient time in your life to have a low blood sugar reaction. To minimize the disruption to your life and help prevent problems, try to make these guidelines a part of your diabetes treatment plan. If your child has diabetes, apply these same guidelines to help keep him or her safe.

Be prepared! Keep a source of pure glucose, such as glucose tablets or liquid, on you, in your diabetes emergency supplies or in places where you spend a lot of time. Think about these locations and how they might fit your life and lifestyle. an office desk drawer, your nightstand, briefcase, travel carry-on bag, spouse or loved one's pocket or purse, backpack, purse, glove compartment of vehicles, a child's lunch box and school locker, teacher's desk, and school health office. Keep in mind school regulations vary. Your child may be able to keep hypoglycemia treatments on their person or they may need to just be in the hands of the school health personnel .

Wear some type of medical identification (I.D.) that lets others know you have diabetes. A bracelet or necklace is best because if you are not able to treat yourself, — a helpful person, police or emergency personnel can quickly identify that you have diabetes. You may also want to carry an "I Have Diabetes" card in your wallet where you can write and keep details about the blood glucose lowering medications you take.

Carry your blood sugar checking supplies at nearly all times. If you have signs and symptoms of a low blood sugar, you'll be able to check and know for sure. You'll also be able to check after you've treated your low to know that you have remedied it.

Tell your loved ones ahead of time how they can help. Familiarize those closest to you with the signs and symptoms of a low and what you need to eat to raise your blood sugar to your target range. Tell them where you keep your glucose tablets or other food or beverage items you use to treat your lows.


Consider your need for additional food to prevent another low blood sugar reaction within the next few hours. Depending on the action curve and current dose of the of your blood glucose-lowering medicine(s) you could be at risk of another low blood sugar reaction soon after the last. Also be aware that there is greater frequency of hypoglycemia while you sleep due to hormonal changes.

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Low Blood Sugar Do's, Continued

Always check your blood sugar before you drive. Make sure your blood sugar is in a safe range. If it's too low, correct it before you start to drive. This protects you, your passengers and people in other vehicles around you.

Check your blood sugar before going to sleep. Knowing your blood sugar number before you go to sleep, and taking any necessary action, can prevent a low during the night. If your child has diabetes check their blood sugar before bed. Depending on their treatment and whether you've recently made changes in their treatment routine, you may also need to check their blood sugar during the night. Discuss what's best for your child with your health care professional.

Inform those around your child about low blood sugar. Tell your child's grandparents, teachers, his or her best friends (if they are of an age at which they can be helpful), and anyone looking after your child what low blood sugar is, its signs, and your child's symptoms. 

Reviewed by Hope Warshaw MMSC, RD, CDE 12/13

Low Blood Sugar Don'ts

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Knowing what not to do to keep your blood sugar under good control is just as important as knowing what to do. Here are some tips to help you with this balancing act.

Do not assume that you will be able to find an accessible source of easy to drink or eat carbohydrate just when you need it to treat your low blood glucose. That's why it's so important that you ALWAYS have an easily accessible, ready to use source of carbohydrate when and where you need it. You may want to carry a source of pure glucose like glucose tablets or a liquid shot. It's also easy to carry hard candy, dried fruit or a small can of fruit juice (4oz). Fat-free milk (8 oz) or regular soda (4 oz) are good treatments, but aren't quite as always accessible to you..

Do not ignore and not treat mild symptoms of low blood sugar or a blood sugar result from a meter or continuous glucose monitor (CGM) that is trending downward. The quicker and earlier you take action the more likely it is you'll avert a more serious low blood glucose.

Do not resist asking for help, or accepting it, if you need it. Sometimes if you are just not thinking clearly, which can happen to some people, a helping hand can help you quickly get the treatment you need and overcome a low more rapidly.

Do not over-correct low blood glucose reactions with more than about 15 grams of carbohydrate for starters. If you need more carbohydrate after 15 minutes, then use another 15 grams of carbohydrate. It is a common response to want to raise your blood sugar quickly to get rid of the symptoms of hypoglycemia. Try your best to minimize the amount you eat because over-correcting can make your blood sugar rise too high and make it harder to control over the next few hours and days. Eating too much carbohydrate and/or fat to treat a low can, if done repeatedly, lead to weight gain. Weight gain can make your diabetes, and any other related conditions, harder to manage. One of the many good reasons to use glucose tablets or liquid to treat a low is that you're unlikely to eat too many of them.

Try not to panic. Whether you are having a low blood glucose reaction, or your child is, try to stay calm. If you feel anxious try to pause and think clearly about what to do. One of the surefire ways to enable yourself to stay calm is to make sure you are ALWAYS at-the-ready to treat a low. Another tip? Think through the steps you'll take to treat a low. Knowing what to do can help you stay calmer. 

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