

Living Well with Diabetes

What to do for low blood sugar: The 15 / 15 rule

If you take diabetes pills that help your body make more insulin, or if you take insulin shots, you might have times when your blood sugar drops too low. This is called hypoglycemia – or low blood sugar.

Common signs of hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) are:

- Shaky
- Sweaty
- Tired
- Anxious, cranky, or confused
- Hungry
- Faster heartbeat
- Blurry vision or headache
- Numbness or tingling in mouth and lips

Follow the 15/15 Rule when you have signs of low blood sugar

Treat low blood sugar right away. Check your blood sugar and if it's 70 or less eat or drink **15 grams** of fast-acting carbohydrate. If blood sugar is less than 54, take 30 grams of fast-acting carbohydrate and contact a member of your health care team. If you're feeling confused, disoriented, or you can't talk clearly, call, or ask someone to call, **9-1-1**

The best choices for fast-acting carbohydrate are 4 glucose tablets or 15 grams of glucose gel. These are absorbed very quickly and are available at most drug stores and pharmacies.

Other 15-gram carbohydrate choices include:

- ½ cup (4 ounces) of fruit juice
- ½ cup (4 ounces) regular soda, such as cola or 7-up
- 1 small box of raisins
- 1 tablespoon of sugar
- Soft candy, such as 7 or 8 gummy bears or 1 pouch of fruit snacks

Check your blood sugar again in **15 minutes** – if it hasn't risen above 70, eat or drink another **15 grams** of carbohydrate.

Wait another **15 minutes**. Then check your blood sugar again. If your blood sugar is still 70 or lower, take another **15 grams** of carbohydrate and call the Consulting Nurse.

After your blood sugar returns to normal

If eating or drinking the carbohydrate brings your blood sugar back into the normal range, plan to eat your next regular meal within an hour.

If you aren't able to eat a meal within an hour, eat a snack that has both carbohydrate and protein in it.

Good snack choices include:

- 1 ounce of low-fat cheese and 4 to 5 whole grain crackers
- 1 hard-cooked egg and 1 slice whole grain bread
- 1 tablespoon of peanut butter and 3 graham crackers
- 1 ounce of nuts, such as almonds or peanuts, and 8 ounces low-fat or non-fat yogurt
- ½ cup cottage cheese and ½ small whole grain bagel
- 1 ounce of lean meat, such as turkey or chicken breast, and 1 small flour or corn tortilla

Problem solving

After you're feeling better, think back over the last 4 to 6 hours. Ask yourself these questions to find out why your blood sugar went too low:

Did I take too much diabetes medicine?

Did I skip a meal, or not eat enough carbohydrate at mealtime?

Did I get more exercise, or was I more active than usual?

Did I drink beer, wine, or another alcoholic beverage that could have caused this problem?

Consulting Nurse Service

Call 24 hours a day: toll-free **1-800-297-6877**

For more information

Visit the Health and Wellness Resources section on the Kaiser Permanente website at kp.org/wa for more information about diabetes and other health topics.