

*Please talk with your doctor about the blood sugar range that is best for you.*

## Diabetes: Hypoglycemia and Hyperglycemia

### Hypoglycemia

Hypoglycemia occurs when your blood sugar level drops too low to provide enough energy for your body's activities. This also is called low blood sugar or low blood glucose. A normal blood sugar range varies with each person. The normal range is about 65 to 99 mg/dL. In most cases, patients with levels below 70 mg/dL are treated for low blood sugar. Please talk with your doctor about the blood sugar range that is best for you.

#### Symptoms

- Hunger
- Nervousness and shakiness
- Sweating
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Sleepiness
- Confusion
- Difficulty speaking
- Feeling anxious or weak
- Irritability or mood change

***Hypoglycemia also can happen while you are sleeping. Signs to watch for include:***

- Pajamas or sheets damp from sweating.
- Crying out or having nightmares.
- Feeling tired, irritable or confused when you wake up.

#### ***Causes of Hypoglycemia***

People taking blood-glucose-lowering medicines can have blood sugars fall too low for a number of reasons, including:

- Meals or snacks that are too small, delayed or skipped.
- Excessive doses of blood-glucose-lowering medicines.
- Increased activity or exercise.
- Excessive alcohol intake.

#### ***Prevention***

It is important to follow a regular schedule to maintain your usual medication times with your usual meals and activities. You should remember several things to help prevent hypoglycemia:

- **Some diabetes medicines** can cause low blood sugar; ask your doctor about yours.
- **Meal plans** designed by your dietitian can help you eat regular meals that fit your preferences and lifestyle.

- **Physical activities**, such as sports or exercise may require a snack or an adjustment to your medication. Talk to your doctor about what is right for you.
- **Blood sugar** should be checked regularly by people with diabetes. Simply checking will help you know if you are having a hypoglycemic episode. If your blood sugar is 70 mg/dL or below, this is considered low blood sugar.
- **A quick source of sugar, like glucose tablets or gel**, should be kept with you at all times in case of a hypoglycemic episode so you are able to treat the problem right away.

### ***Treatment—Follow “The Rule of 15”***

- If you think your blood sugar is too low, use a blood glucose meter to check your level.
- If it is 70mg/dL or below, take 15 grams of a fast-acting carbohydrate.

Take **only** 1 of the following:

- 3 to 4 glucose tablets or a tube of glucose gel
- Toddler size (4 ounce) juice box
- 3 sugar packets
- 8 ounces of skim milk.

- Wait 15 minutes.
- Check your blood sugar again.
- Repeat the treatment until your blood sugar is within your normal range.

If you do not have your meter with you and are feeling symptoms of low blood sugar, follow “The Rule of 15.”

## **Hyperglycemia**

Hyperglycemia is another name for high blood sugar levels. Please check with your doctor for the blood sugar range that is best for you.

### ***Symptoms***

- Thirst
- Frequent urination
- Fatigue
- Blurred vision
- Increased hunger
- Dry skin
- Slow-healing wounds

## ***Causes of Hyperglycemia***

Hyperglycemia may occur for several reasons, including:

- Change or increase in food intake
- Wrong or missed dose of insulin or diabetes medications (pills or injectables)
- Side-effect of some medications
- Not enough physical activity
- Emotional stress
- Illness

## ***Long-term Complications***

- Heart disease
- Kidney disease
- Vision loss
- Nerve damage
- Liver damage
- Skin sores
- Infection

## ***Prevention/Treatment***

Hyperglycemia can be avoided in many cases. Remember these suggested actions to help maintain control of your blood sugar.

- **Check food intake** and look for ways to improve your eating pattern. Ask your dietitian for help.
- **Take insulin or diabetes medications (pills or injectables)** in the prescribed doses and at the correct times. Contact your doctor if you are concerned.
- **Drink plenty of water** to prevent dehydration.
- **Try increasing your physical activity** gradually and make it a part of your lifestyle.
- **Consider ways of reducing stress** through relaxation training or stress management.
- **See your doctor** if you are ill to ensure the illness is treated as soon as possible.
- **Do not skip diabetes medications on sick days.** Contact your doctor.

## **Northwestern Medicine – Health Information Resources**

For more information, contact Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Alberto Culver Health Learning Center (HLC) at [hlc@nm.org](mailto:hlc@nm.org), or by calling 312.926.5465. You may also visit the HLC on the 3rd floor, Galter Pavilion at 251 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL. Health information professionals can help you find the information you need and provide you with personal support at no charge.

For more information about Northwestern Medicine, please visit our website at [nm.org](http://nm.org).

*Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar al Departamento de Representantes para Pacientes al 312.926.3112.*

The entities that come together as Northwestern Medicine are committed to representing the communities we serve, fostering a culture of inclusion, delivering culturally competent care, providing access to treatment and programs in a nondiscriminatory manner and eliminating healthcare disparities. For questions, please call either Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Patient Representatives Department at 312.926.3112, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363, the Northwestern Lake Forest Patient Relations manager at 847.535.8282 and/or the Northwestern Medical Group Patient Representatives Department at 312.695.1100, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363.

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