

# Exercise and Hypoglycemia

The biggest safety concern for people who take insulin or certain oral medications for diabetes is that exercise can cause your blood glucose to drop too low.

When your blood glucose drops below 70 mg/dL you have low blood glucose. This is called Hypoglycemia. Hypoglycemia develops when the parts of your management plan become out of balance.

Your blood glucose level can drop too low if you skip a meal or don't eat enough carbohydrates, if you exercise more than usual, or if the type or amount of your medication needs adjusting.

When this happens, your body doesn't get the energy it needs to function.

Everyone can experience different symptoms, but these may include increased sweating, headache, weakness, a cold sweat or clammy feeling, shakiness, hunger, irritability, and dizziness.

*"When I feel low I feel-- I don't think clearly, I get agitated, physically I start to sweat."*

If you notice any of these symptoms while exercising, stop at once. Symptoms of hypoglycemia can begin suddenly and get worse quickly. It can even cause you to pass out.

Talk to your diabetes care team about the best ways to avoid hypoglycemia. Here are some tips.

Make sure your blood glucose level is in a healthy range before you start.

Don't exercise when your insulin or oral medications are at their peak because that's when they are working best to lower your blood glucose.

You may have to eat 1 to 2 hours before you exercise. This will give you the glucose your body needs to function at your exercise level.

If you do notice any symptoms of hypoglycemia while you are exercising, stop what you are doing and check your blood glucose if you can.

If it is below 70 mg/dl. or if you feel too shaky, confused or weak to check it, follow this procedure.

Eat or drink at least 15 grams of a fast-acting carbohydrate. That could be four to six ounces of fruit juice or regular soda, chewing three to four glucose tablets or hard candies, or 8 ounces of non-fat milk.

Rest for 15 minutes.

Recheck your glucose level. If it hasn't risen above 80 mg/dl., or if you still feel some symptoms, have 15 more grams of carbohydrate.

Once your blood glucose is in a safe range, you need to make sure it doesn't drop again in the next few hours.

If your next meal is scheduled within 30 minutes, eat it right away.

If it's more than one hour away, have a snack that contains a slower acting carbohydrate and some protein.

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Be sure you write down your low blood glucose readings in your logbook. And tell your diabetes care team about them at your next visit so they can determine if changes are needed in your management plan.

If you are at risk for hypoglycemia, it is a good idea to plan for it ahead of time.

Always carry some quick acting carbohydrate food, juice or glucose tabs with you when you go out or to exercise.

When you can, exercise with a friend. Teach your exercise partner to recognize the signs of hypoglycemia and make sure he or she knows where your snacks are if you need help.

Wear a medical id bracelet. And give friends a list of emergency phone numbers.

There is also a chance you may experience hypoglycemia hours after you finish exercising because your muscles continue to use glucose after the exercise has stopped. This is called late onset hypoglycemia.

Most often it happens more than twelve hours later. It is more likely to happen with moderate to intense exercise that lasts longer than 30 minutes.

Hypoglycemia can be scary but with time and experience you will learn how to balance your food choices, physical activity and medications to avoid low blood glucose.