

Diabetes Medications, Hypoglycemia and Sick Days

Make taking your medications for diabetes a regular part of your daily routine. If something changes in your routine or you are sick, you may need to make adjustments to ensure you are still keeping your blood glucose in a healthy range.

For example, if you skip a meal, or exercise more than usual while taking certain diabetes medications, you may be at an increased risk of Hypoglycemia or low blood glucose, especially if you also take insulin.

Hypoglycemia can be serious and may cause you to pass out.

Hypoglycemia is a side effect of some diabetes medications and occurs when your blood glucose drops too low; below 70 mg/dL. When this happens, your body doesn't get the energy it needs.

Symptoms you may experience include headache, weakness, a cold sweat or clammy feeling, shakiness, hunger, irritability, and dizziness.

Discuss the best way to deal with hypoglycemia with your diabetes care team, but here are some general guidelines.

If you experience any symptoms, check your blood glucose. If it's below 70mg/dL, or if you feel too shaky, confused, or weak to check it- follow this procedure.

Eat or drink something containing 15 grams of carbohydrate.

Foods that have 15 grams of carbohydrate include the following 3 to 4 glucose tablets, hard candy (such as 6 Life Savers), half cup of fruit juice or regular (not diet) soda, or 1 tablespoon table sugar.

Because some medications work to slow the digestion of foods, talk to your diabetes care team about the best carbohydrate choices for you.

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 of carbohydrate and protein.

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Keep track of your low blood glucose readings and share with your diabetes care team at your next visit.

If you have frequent or severe episodes notify your diabetes care team as soon as possible.

These often signal that changes are needed with some part of your management plan.

Ask if glucagon is right for you.

Glucagon is an injectable medication used when a person with diabetes has lost consciousness because of hypoglycemia to raise the blood glucose level.

Since glucagon requires a prescription, talk with your diabetes care team to see if you need to keep glucagon on hand.

Wear medical identification; carry a carbohydrate food with you at all times; and be sure to check your blood glucose before driving a car.

Finally, be aware that drinking alcohol and taking medications for diabetes may put you at risk for low blood glucose.

You should discuss alcohol use with your diabetes care team to learn how to use it safely and remember to eat if you do choose to drink.

An illness like a cold or the flu, can raise your blood glucose. High blood glucose can complicate your illness and slow your recovery.

It's important to continue taking your diabetes medications if you become sick. However, you may need to make some adjustments.

Knowing how to manage your diabetes medications when you're sick can help you better manage your blood glucose. So, before you get sick, prepare a sick-day plan with your diabetes care team.

On days when you are sick, let your diabetes care team know if you: have difficulty taking your medications as directed, notice any side effects or unusual symptoms, or think your medication is not working as it should.

Try to follow your usual meal plan as best as you can.

Items like ice pops, regular gelatin and fruit juice may be needed to provide energy if you cannot stick to your meal plan but are able to eat some solid food.

Be sure to drink plenty of water and other fluids.

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Try drinking 6 to 8 ounces of fluid per hour, especially if you are too sick to eat solid foods.

Check with your diabetes care team on what type of beverages may be best during these periods of illness.

Sick days and changes in your routine happen. Knowing what changes to make to your self-care plan will help you through it.

Remember to take your diabetes medications as directed, know how to recognize and treat hypoglycemia, and develop a sick day plan so you can manage whatever life throws your way.