



Managing diabetic emergencies

People with diabetes can experience emergencies when their blood sugar (also known as glucose) becomes too low or too high. If you have diabetes, it's important to know the signs and share this information with your family and friends, so they can help you respond quickly.

Types of diabetic emergencies

Blood sugar target levels are different for everyone. Your care team will help you understand what your numbers mean, when to reach out, and when it's time to take action.



Hypoglycemia

Hypoglycemia, or low blood sugar, generally occurs when blood glucose levels fall below 70 mg/dL. Some common causes include:

- Skipping meals or eating too little
- Having too much insulin or diabetes medication
- Being more physically active than usual
- Vomiting or illness

You may experience the following symptoms:

- Sweating, shakiness, fast heartbeat
- Hunger, pale skin, fatigue
- Confusion, slurred speech, blurry vision
- Unconsciousness or seizures



Hyperglycemia

Hyperglycemia, or high blood sugar, generally occurs when blood glucose levels rise above 350 mg/dL, with severe cases reaching over 1,000 mg/dL. Some common causes include:

- Missed medication
- Eating too much
- Having an infection or illness
- Low levels of physical activity

You may experience the following symptoms:

- Fatigue, thirst, frequent urination
- Headache, nausea, fruity breath
- Blurred vision, shortness of breath



What to do in a diabetic emergency

If you think you are experiencing a diabetic emergency, follow these steps:

- If you have a blood glucose meter, test your blood sugar.
- If your blood sugar reads low, try having some apple juice or sugar tablets to give sugar. Call your doctor if it stays low.
- If your blood sugar reads high, take insulin (if prescribed), drink water, avoid sugar, and call your doctor if it stays high or you feel sick.

How to help someone having a diabetic emergency

Share this information with friends and loved ones so they know how to help in an emergency:

- **Call 911 immediately if the person is experiencing chest pain, vomiting, trouble finding words, or slurred speech, or is fainting, unconscious, or unresponsive.**
- If you're not sure if their blood sugar is too high or too low, give them sugar. In cases of low blood sugar, fast-acting sugar can be lifesaving. If their sugar is actually high, a small amount of sugar is unlikely to cause harm.
- If they're not fully alert or can't swallow safely, don't try to give drinks or food. Instead, use glucose gel if available. You can also use something like honey or cake frosting. Rub it on the inside of their cheek or along their gum line to help absorb the sugar safely.



We are here to help

Your Interwell Health Care Team can help you understand the types of diabetic emergencies, recognize the signs, and take steps before they become serious.