

● By Miriam E. Tucker

Think Fast

Low blood glucose, also called hypoglycemia, can happen to anyone with diabetes who uses insulin or oral type 2 medications in either the sulfonylurea or meglitinide class of drugs. In addition to the meds you take, several other factors play a role in hypoglycemia. Physical activity, for instance, can cause blood glucose levels to drop even up to 24 hours after the exercise.

The symptoms, which include shakiness, dizziness, sweating, and weakness, can vary from person to person, but it's nearly always a scary feeling. When you have a low, you just want it to go away—fast. It's very important for people with diabetes who are at risk for hypoglycemia to always keep fast-acting glucose nearby.

Although candy and sugary drinks can do the job, specifically designed glucose products—tablets, gels, liquids, or powders—are preferable for several reasons. For one, they contain no fat (as candy bars do), which can slow

absorption of the glucose. Second, they contain precise amounts of fast-acting glucose, so you know exactly how much you're getting.

With these products, "you're less likely to overtreat because they're premeasured and don't taste as good as a chocolate bar," says Kellie Antinori-Lent, RN, CDE, a diabetes clinical nurse specialist at UPMC Shadyside in Pittsburgh.

When you feel or suspect a low, or if you have a blood glucose reading of less than 70 mg/dl, consume 15 to 20 grams of fast-acting carbohydrate. If your blood glucose is less than 40 mg/dl, eat or drink 30 to 40 grams of fast-acting carbohydrate.

Wait 15 minutes, then check your blood glucose. If it's still less than 70 mg/dl, take the same amount of glucose again. Adhering to this "15-Minute Rule" will help you avoid overtreating, which can lead to a high blood glucose level. That said, you might need to eat a meal or snack once your glucose returns to normal to prevent another low.

The exact amount of glucose needed to treat a low can vary from person to person, and sometimes even for the same person (say, when you have active insulin in your system versus when you don't). What's clear, though, is this: Anyone at risk for lows should know how to treat them—and always keep a source of glucose at hand.

Take Note!

In addition to these products, many chain pharmacies, supermarkets, and big box stores carry their own brands of glucose products—such as Walmart does with its ReliOn products, listed here. Store-brand glucose contains the same amounts of fast-acting glucose and may be less expensive, although it might not taste the same.

→ GELS

Dex4

(Perrigo)
Carb: 15 grams per pouch
Dose: One pouch
Details: One-dose disposable pouch. Comes in fruit punch flavor.

Glucose 15

(Perrigo)
Carb: 15 grams per tube
Dose: One tube
Details: One-dose disposable tube. Available in grape and lemon flavors.

Insta-Glucose

(Valeant Pharmaceuticals)
Carb: 24 grams per tube
Dose: One tube
Details: Comes in a three-pack of squeezable (non-resealable) tubes. Available in cherry flavor.

TruePlus Glucose Gel

(Trividia Health)
Carb: 15 grams per pouch
Dose: One pouch
Details: Disposable pouch. Comes in fruit punch flavor.

ReliOn

(Walmart)
Carb: 15 grams per tube
Dose: One tube
Details: Twist-cap tube. Comes in fruit punch flavor.

Transcend

(Transcend Foods)
Carb: 15 grams per pouch
Dose: One pouch
Details: Comes in two three-packs, or packs of 12, 20, or 30 loose pouches. Available in strawberry flavor.

→ TABLETS

Dex4

(Perrigo)
Carb: 4 grams per tablet
Dose: Four tablets for 16 grams of carb
Details: Available in a 10-tablet tube, 50-tablet bottle, and 100-tablet pouch. Choose from citrus punch, grape, natural orange, orange, raspberry, tropical fruit, and assorted fruit flavors.

Glucolift

(Jungell)
Carb: 4 grams per tablet
Dose: Four tablets for 16 grams of carb
Details: Available in 40-tablet jars. Comes in wildberry and orange cream flavors. Reusable travel tube (sold separately) holds eight tablets.

Optimum

(Magno-Humphries Labs)
Carb: 4 grams per tablet
Dose: Four tablets for 16 grams of carb
Details: Available in a 50-tablet bottle. Comes in orange flavor.

ReliOn

(Walmart)
Carb: 4 grams per tablet
Dose: Four tablets for 16 grams of carb
Details: Available in a 10-tablet tube and 50-tablet bottle. Comes in grape, orange, fruit punch, raspberry, and tropical assorted fruit flavors.

TruePlus Glucose Tablets

(Trividia Health)
Carb: 4 grams per tablet
Dose: Four tablets for 16 grams of carb
Details: Available in a 50-tablet bottle and 10-tablet tube. Comes in grape, orange, raspberry, assorted fruit, and tropical fruit flavors.

→ LIQUIDS

Dex4

(Perrigo)
Carb: 15 grams per bottle
Dose: One bottle
Details: Resealable screw-top bottle. Comes in grape and berry twist flavors.

ReliOn Glucose Drink

(Walmart)
Carb: 15 grams per bottle
Dose: One bottle
Details: Resealable screw-top bottle. Comes in mixed berry flavor.

ReliOn Glucose Shot

(Walmart)
Carb: 15 grams per bottle
Dose: One bottle
Details: Resealable screw-top bottle. Comes in orange and pomegranate flavors.

TruePlus Glucose Shot

(Trividia Health)
Carb: 15 grams per bottle
Dose: One bottle
Details: Resealable screw-top bottle. Comes in mixed berry, orange, and pomegranate flavors.

→ POWDER

EloVate 15

(Diasan Corp.)
Carb: 15 grams per packet
Dose: One packet
Details: Sold in boxes containing six individual packets of fine powder that can be eaten directly from the pouch or mixed with water. Comes in black cherry flavor.

TOOL OF THE TRADE

If a person is unconscious or can't swallow, do not give them food or drink.

In such situations, a prescription **glucagon kit** can literally be a lifesaver. Both Eli Lilly and Novo Nordisk make rescue kits with glucagon, a hormone that raises blood glucose levels when injected under the skin. Kits contain a powdered form of glucagon and a syringe preloaded with sterile water or a diluting solution. The two substances are mixed and then injected into the person who needs it by someone else, such as a friend, family member, or coworker.

Glucagon kits can be expensive, so check the expiration date before you buy. "Make sure it won't expire for at least a year since it may have a large co-pay," says Kellie Antinori-Lent, RN, CDE, a diabetes clinical nurse specialist at UPMC Shadyside in Pittsburgh. Also make sure your helpers know where to find your kit and how to use it.

