

1.1. Hypoglycaemia

Hypoglycemia occurs when blood sugar levels becomes low. This happens when low blood sugar levels become less than 4mmol/L. This is a serious problem among person who are receiving treatment for type 2 diabetes. Persons who are being treated with insulin or medications that promote the release of insulin like suphonylureas (glibenclamide, glyburide, gliclazide, glimepiride, glipizide) have a higher risk of experiencing very low blood sugar level of less than 4mmol/L (72mg/dL).

Low blood sugar levels can be mild, moderate or severe. It can become a life-threatening emergency when the severe forms occur.

Common signs and symptoms of low blood sugar according to severity

Mild form of low blood sugar	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Sweating▪ Shakiness▪ Hunger▪ Headache▪ Fast heart rate▪ Dizziness▪ Nausea
Moderate form of low blood sugar	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Confusion▪ Feel like sleeping▪ General body weakness and extreme tiredness
Severe form of low blood sugar	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Loss of consciousness▪ Seizures or convulsions▪ Coma

Hypoglycaemia unawareness

Most persons with type 2 diabetes are able to recognize the signs and symptoms of when their blood glucose is getting very low. But some persons may not become aware of this. This may happen as a result of:

- Many years of living with type 2 diabetes: some person who have had type 2 diabetes for a very long time gradually lose the capacity to detect signs and symptoms of low blood sugar
- Sleep: some people experience low blood sugar levels when sleeping
- Exercise: after some exercise, the muscles may continue to be sensitive to insulin and use up glucose at a faster rate than normal for some hours after the exercise. This will contribute to low blood sugar levels

- Age: Elderly persons are likely to gradually lose their capacity to remember things and process information. This can affect the ability to recognize signs and symptoms of hypoglycaemia

How to avoid hypoglycaemia:

- Measure blood sugar levels regularly during the day to recognize when it is low and adjust medications and meals accordingly
- Measure blood sugar level before and after exercise
- Avoid skipping meals. Monitor blood sugar levels when meals are skipped and adjust medications accordingly
- Early recognition of mild symptoms which can be considered as warning signs.

What to do when blood sugar levels are low

Mild form of low blood sugar	<p><u>Step one:</u> Take fruit juice, glucose powder, cubes of sugar or eat fruits with high glucose content. Aim to take up to 15 grams of glucose or sugar</p> <p><u>Step two:</u> Monitor blood sugar after 10 minutes.</p> <p><u>Step three:</u> if it is still low, repeat step one</p>
Moderate form of low blood sugar	<p><u>Step one:</u> Take fruit juice, glucose powder, cubes of sugar or eat fruits with high glucose content. Aim to take up to 30 grams of glucose or sugar</p> <p><u>Step two:</u> Monitor blood sugar after 10 minutes.</p> <p><u>Step three:</u> if it is still low, repeat step one</p>
Severe form of low blood sugar	<p>Call for emergency help</p> <p>Look for a person who is trained to give glucagon injection to do so</p>
As a rule always carry an emergency glucose kit that contains drugs or foods that can help to increase blood sugar levels when it becomes very low. The drugs are usually prescribed by a doctor	