



Managing Low Blood Sugar in Children

Children who take insulin are at risk for low blood sugar. When your child has low blood sugar, you need to act quickly to prevent a medical emergency. Learn to recognize and treat your child's low blood sugar – and take steps to prevent it.

Managing low blood sugar is all about balance.

Having a child with diabetes means balancing what they eat, their physical activity level, and their insulin to keep their blood sugar in the normal range. When any of these 3 things are out of balance, your child's blood sugar can get too high – or too low.

Blood sugar is measured in mg/dL (milligrams per deciliter). Usually, low blood sugar means getting a number less than 70. But this number may be different for some children. Ask your child's health care provider what number is low for them.

In this material, you'll learn:

- How to recognize low blood sugar
- How to treat low blood sugar
- How to prepare for a low blood sugar emergency
- How to help prevent low blood sugar

How to Recognize Low Blood Sugar

When your child has low blood sugar, they may have several different symptoms – or no symptoms at all. And their symptoms may not be the same every time they have low blood sugar.

How can I recognize low blood sugar in my child?

When your child has a low blood sugar reading, ask them to tell you how they feel. This can help both of you recognize symptoms more quickly in the future.

Very young children may have trouble describing how they're feeling. Help them choose a special word or phrase they can use to let you know when they feel this way – like "I feel wobbly." Teach them to tell you or another caregiver whenever they have this feeling.

If your child has symptoms of low blood sugar, they may feel:

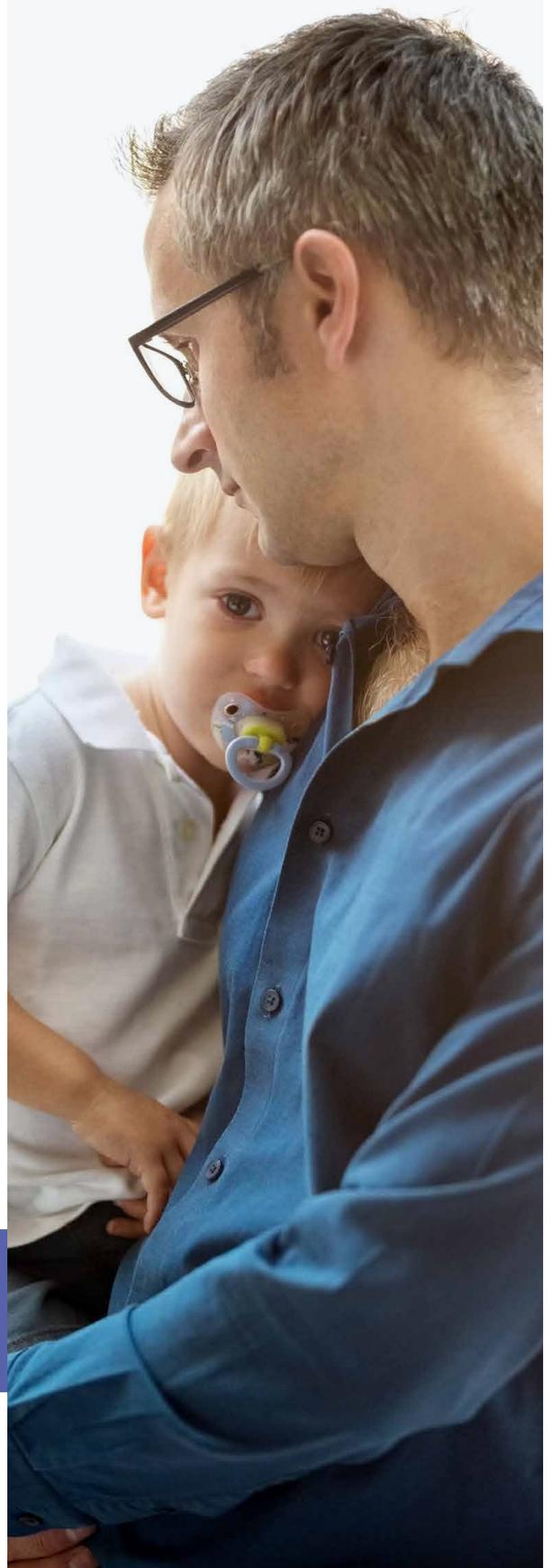
- Hungry
- Shaky
- Sweaty
- Sleepy

Your child may also have:

- Pale skin
- Blurry or double vision
- Headaches
- Changes in behavior, like crying or crankiness
- Trouble concentrating

If your child is having any of these symptoms but you aren't sure if low blood sugar is the cause, check their blood sugar.

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Low blood sugar can quickly progress to **severe low blood sugar**. If this happens, your child may:

- Become confused
- Have mood swings or act angry
- Have trouble walking and talking

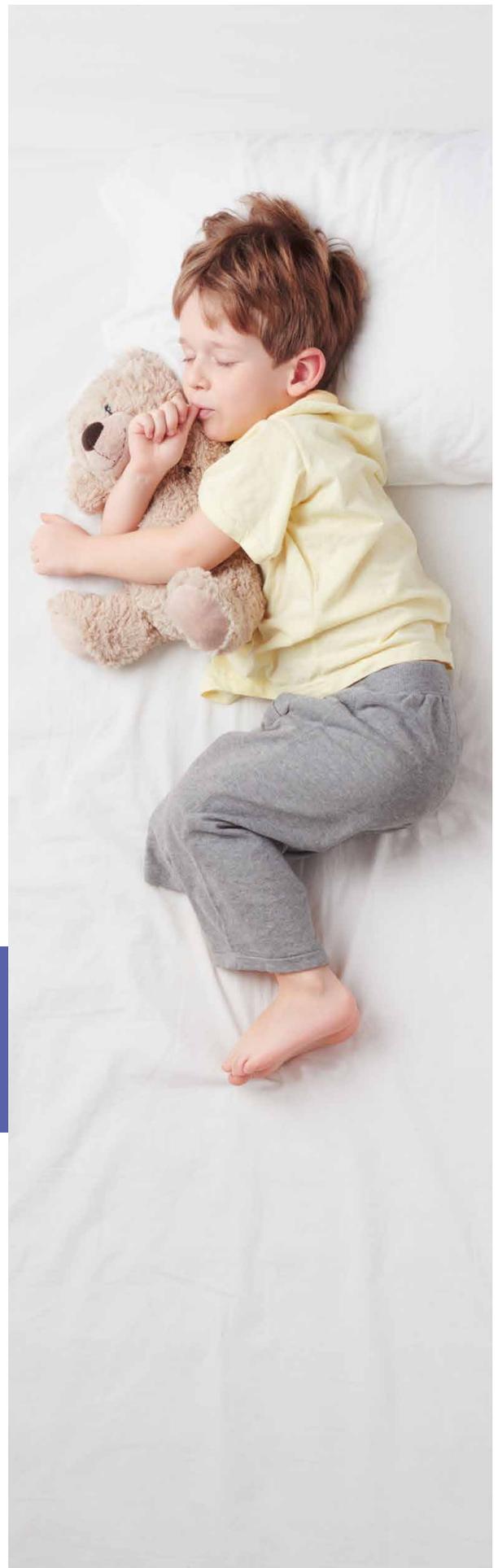
If low blood sugar is not treated in time, it could cause your child to pass out or have seizures. It could even cause death.

Many children have low blood sugar while they're sleeping. Watch for these signs in your child:

- Having nightmares or crying out in their sleep
- Sweating so much that their clothes or sheets get damp
- Having seizures during the night
- Seeming tired, cranky, or confused when they wake up
- Having headaches when they wake up

If you think your child is having low blood sugar overnight, talk to their health care provider.

It's important to **check your child's blood sugar regularly**, especially when you think it might be low. **If it's low, treat it right away.**



How to Treat Low Blood Sugar

If your child's blood sugar is low (below 70), they need to eat or drink carbohydrates (carbs) to raise it. They can get the carbs they need from sugar or sugary foods and drinks. Follow these steps:

- Give your child about 15 grams of carbs
- Wait 15 minutes
- Recheck your child's blood sugar
- If it's still low, repeat the steps until it's above 70
- Once their blood sugar is normal, give them a snack or small meal to keep it stable

What kind of carbs should I give my child?

You can give your child special glucose (sugar) tablets or gels to quickly raise their blood sugar. You can usually get 15 grams of carbs from:



4 chewable glucose tablets



1 tube of glucose gel

Other examples of 15 grams of carbs include:



Half a cup (or 4 ounces) of fruit juice



Half a cup (or 4 ounces) of regular soda — not diet



3 packets (or 1 tablespoon) of table sugar

If your child is under 100 pounds, they may need less than 15 grams of carbs, and the amount they need may change as they grow. Ask your child's health care provider how many grams of carbs they need to treat their low blood sugar.



How to Prepare for an Emergency

Severe low blood sugar is a medical emergency.

If your child's blood sugar gets very low, they may:

- Become confused
- Have mood swings or act angry
- Have trouble walking and talking

If your child has severe low blood sugar, they may not be able to eat or drink. They may even pass out or have a seizure. **If they can't eat or drink, give them glucagon** (GLOO-ka-gon) right away — and then **call 911**.

Glucagon is a special emergency medicine that helps your child's body release sugar quickly into their blood. **Glucagon is not glucose or insulin.** Your child's health care provider can prescribe glucagon and show you how it works.

After your child gets glucagon and they can drink again, give them small sips of juice or regular soda. They should eat food when they're feeling better.

Take steps to prepare for a low blood sugar emergency.

- Keep glucagon at home and at your child's school (usually in the nurse's office) — and make sure to replace the glucagon when it expires
- Teach other people who care for your child (like family members, teachers, and coaches) when and how to give glucagon and call 911
- Encourage your child to wear a medical alert ID (like a bracelet or pin) that says they have diabetes and take insulin

Talk with your child's health care provider if your child is having low blood sugar. They may need to adjust your child's diabetes medicine or suggest other ways to prevent low blood sugar.



How to Help Prevent Low Blood Sugar

Understanding what caused your child's low blood sugar can help you prevent it from happening again. Causes of low blood sugar include:

- Missing a meal
- Eating a meal later than usual
- Taking too much insulin
- Getting more physical activity than usual

It's important to check your child's blood sugar regularly and often. Work with your child's health care provider to find the best way to do this. Take these additional steps to lower your child's risk:

Manage meals.

- Make sure your child eats regular meals. If they can't eat at a regular mealtime, give your child a snack with carbs and protein in it to keep their blood sugar stable until the next meal. And make sure they never skip meals.
- Check how many grams of carbs your child is eating. Find exact carb counts on food and drink labels. Your child's health care provider can help you learn to count carbs in their favorite foods, adjust portion sizes, and plan for meals in restaurants.

Manage insulin doses.

- Give the right dose at the right time. Double-check the amount of insulin your child needs at mealtimes and when you need to treat them for high blood sugar.
- Be patient. It takes time for insulin to lower your child's blood sugar after meals. Don't give them another insulin dose too soon after the last one. If your child misses a dose, ask their health care provider what to do.



Manage physical activity.

- Make sure your child's blood sugar is in a good range before activity, like sports or playing tag. Before physical activity, aim for a blood sugar reading between 126 and 180. Ask your child's health care provider about the right pre-activity blood sugar target for them.
- Adjust for activity. Your child may need to eat more carbs or take less insulin when they play sports or do other physical activities. Talk with your child's health care provider if you need help adjusting insulin doses and carbs.
- Keep checking blood sugar after activity. Your child is at increased risk for low blood sugar for several hours after they are very active.

Be prepared for low blood sugar.

- Always have treatments for low blood sugar handy — and if your child is old enough, make sure they do too
- Teach family members, school nurses, teachers, coaches, bus drivers, and other caregivers how to recognize and treat low blood sugar in your child

There's more than one way to help your child manage their diabetes. Work with your child's health care provider to make a low blood sugar prevention plan that's right for your family.

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You may access this Pediatric Hypoglycemia Fact Sheet at:
DiabetesEducator.org/hypoglycemia

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