



First aid fact sheet

Diabetes emergency



If you are not sure if the patient has low or high blood sugar, give them a drink containing sugar (DO NOT use 'diet' soft drinks, eg Coke Zero, Pepsi Max). Giving any form of sugar can save a patient's life if blood sugar is low, and will not cause undue harm if blood sugar is high.

Signs and symptoms

High blood sugar

- excessive thirst
- tiredness
- blurred vision
- hot, dry skin
- smell of acetone on breath

Low blood sugar

- weakness, shaking
- sweating
- headache
- faintness, dizziness
- lack of concentration
- teariness or crying
- irritability or altered behaviour
- hunger
- numbness around the lips and fingers

These can progress quickly to:

- slurred speech
- confusion
- loss of consciousness
- seizures

What to do

High blood sugar (hyperglycaemia)

- 1 If the patient has medication, ask if they need assistance administering it. Only help the patient if they request it.
- 2 Encourage the patient to drink water.
- 3 Seek medical aid if symptoms worsen.
- 4 If the patient has not yet been diagnosed with diabetes, encourage them to seek medical aid.

Low blood sugar (hypoglycaemia)

- 1 Help the patient to sit or lie in a comfortable position.
- 2 Reassure the patient.
- 3 Loosen any tight clothing.
- 4 Give the patient sugar, such as fruit juice or a soft drink (NOT 'diet' eg Coke Zero, Pepsi Max), sugar, jellybeans, glucose tablets.
- 5 Continue giving sugar every 15 minutes until the patient recovers.
- 6 Follow with carbohydrates, eg a sandwich, milk, fresh or dry fruit, or dry biscuits and cheese.
- 7 If there is no improvement in symptoms or the patient becomes unconscious, call **Triple Zero (000)** for an ambulance.

In a medical emergency call Triple Zero (000)

DRSABCD Danger ▶ Response ▶ Send for help ▶ Airway ▶ Breathing ▶ CPR ▶ Defibrillation

You could save a life with first aid training • www.stjohn.org.au • 1300 360 455

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HYPOGLYCAEMIC ATTACK

There are many symptoms that can be associated with low blood sugar.
The following is a shortlist of the more common ones:



Hypoglycaemic Attack (Low blood sugar)

Many symptoms can be associated with low blood sugar. The following is a short list of the more common ones:

- Mental confusion, inability to concentrate
- Headache
- Sweating
- Pale skin
- Mood swings, such as temper outburst
- Rapid pulse
- Dizziness or light-headedness
- Trembling, shaking, tiredness or weakness
- Hunger, a craving for sweets
- Slurred speech
- Unresponsive or seizure

- May progress to unconsciousness

First Aid For Hypoglycaemia

1. The best way to treat severe hypoglycaemia is to make the affected person eat or drink something that will quickly raise the blood sugar level. This can be a glass of orange juice, a slice of bread, or a candy bar.
2. If the person is conscious but unable to eat or drink, they may need an injection of **glucagon**, a hormone that raises blood sugar levels.
3. Call triple zero (000) for medical assistance if the patient loses consciousness.

Once the casualty is feeling better, suggest a small meal with carbohydrates (e.g. sandwich & milk), as this will help stabilise their blood sugar over a more extended period

If the condition deteriorates or does not improve:

- The casualty becomes unconscious; [follow DRSABCD](#)
- Seek medical aid urgently

DO NOT attempt to feed an unconscious casualty sweet food by mouth, as this will only cause a significant risk to their airways and likely cause them to choke.

HYPERGLYCAEMIA (HIGH BLOOD SUGAR) SYMPTOMS

The most common symptoms of hyperglycaemia are:



Excessive thirst



Excessive and frequent urination



Recent weight loss



Rapid breathing



Nausea and vomiting, abdominal pain



Rapid pulse



Fruity sweet smell of acetone on the breath (similar to paint thinner or nail polish Remover)



Dry skin and mouth, with sunken eyes (signs of dehydration)



Confusion, a deteriorating level of consciousness, or unresponsiveness

Hyperglycaemia (High blood sugar)

High blood sugar generally occurs in people with undiagnosed diabetes. The effect is a build-up of toxins in the blood called Ketoacidosis. Prolonged high blood glucose also alters the shape of the lens in the eye; hence, blurred vision can also be a symptom.

When Ketoacidosis is present, the smell of acetone may be found to be present in the casualty's breath (this is a lovely smell), as well as rapid, deep breathing, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain and a state of altered consciousness. It can lead to unconsciousness if not managed.

Hyperglycaemia (High blood sugar) Symptoms:

The most common symptoms of hyperglycaemia are:

- Excessive thirst
- Excessive and frequent urination
- Recent weight loss
- Rapid pulse
- Nausea and vomiting, abdominal pain
- Rapid breathing

- Fruity, sweet smell of acetone on the breath (similar to paint thinner or nail polish Remover)
- Dry skin and mouth, with sunken eyes (signs of dehydration)
- Confusion, a deteriorating level of consciousness, or unresponsiveness

First Aid For Hyperglycaemia

1. Check the person's blood sugar level and treat it if it is high (over 11mmol/L)
2. If an insulin injection combined with medication potentiated blood glucose lowering, give the person a sugary drink or food if they feel dizzy, shaky, or faint.
3. Call 000 if the person does not have diabetes and their blood sugar level is very high or if they are having trouble breathing.
4. Stay and closely monitor the patient until medical help arrives

To prevent these kinds of emergencies, do more physical activities, eat less, and, if necessary, visit your doctor for insulin adjustments.