



First aid fact sheet

Diabetes emergency

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 may 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.



If you are unsure whether 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.

In a medical emergency call Triple Zero (000)

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

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