



Diabetes Symptoms to Never Ignore

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WebMD Feature

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One of the keys to leading a healthy life with diabetes is to keep your glucose levels, or blood sugar, in check. As your main source of energy, glucose plays a big role in keeping your body working like it should. If you have either type of diabetes, you need to be aware of symptoms that may mean your glucose is out of balance.

Type 2 Diabetes in Children

Just a few years ago, it was rare to hear about a child with type 2 diabetes. It used to be thought that if diabetes occurred in childhood, it was type 1, or juvenile-onset, diabetes. Not anymore. Now, according to the CDC, more than 186,000 people younger than age 20 have diabetes -- both type 1 and type 2 diabetes, formerly called adult-onset diabetes. How can you prevent this threat to your child's health? What can you do if your child is diagnosed with type 2 diabetes?

Symptom: Acting Drunk or Losing Consciousness

Your brain can be affected if your sugar level drops too low.

Low glucose can cause you to stagger, slur words, or even pass out.

What to do: It's smart to wear a medical bracelet or necklace that lets people know you have diabetes.

If your blood sugar gets too low, taking in about 15 to 20 grams of a simple carb may help. Some examples are a half a cup of orange juice, 2 tablespoons of raisins, or a tablespoon of sugar. Glucose tablets and gel tubes are also available. Some people keep an injectable hormone called glucagon on hand and tell their friends how to give them the shot in case they faint or can't swallow. Ask your doctor if keeping glucagon on hand is right for you.

If you still don't feel like yourself after drinking juice or getting a glucagon shot, call 911. If your blood sugar returns to your target range, eat a meal or snack to prevent it from dropping again.

Always let your doctor know if you had an episode of low blood sugar. Your treatment plan may have to be adjusted.

If your blood sugar is too high:

Symptom: Excessive Urination

It's normal to release as much as 84 ounces of urine a day -- that's about 2 liters. Since you probably don't measure your urine output at home, you may have to figure out whether you're making too much of it.

What to do: “Waking at night to urinate and urinating larger amounts than usual can mean something is wrong,” says David Michael Erani, MD. He is an endocrinologist at Joslin Diabetes Center in Boston and an instructor of medicine at Harvard Medical School. People with an overactive bladder or men with an enlarged prostate may urinate frequently as well. But as long as the actual amount has not increased, it doesn’t necessarily mean you have uncontrolled glucose.

Symptom: Excessive thirst

Being thirstier than usual can be brought on by warm weather, salty foods, or an increase in your workout routine. But your thirst can also be brought on by too much urination.

What to do: Continue to drink when you're thirsty. If you're dehydrated, though, you may need medical care.

Thirst may mean “your body is signaling you to drink more,” says Fernando Ovalle, MD. He is director of the Diabetes & Endocrine Clinical Research Unit at the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Medicine. Urinating and drinking more than a gallon a day is a signal that something is wrong.

Symptom: Losing weight while eating normally

When your glucose is high, you may be losing calories in your urine. “Your body is making you hungry and thirsty to keep up with the lost fluids and calories,” says Ovalle.

What to do: See your doctor to discuss your diet or have your meds adjusted accordingly.

Symptom: Extreme fatigue

Still exhausted after 7 to 8 hours of sleep per night? Glucose is your main source of energy, but if it's too high, your body isn't able to use it properly.

What to do: See your doctor to discuss your diet or have your meds adjusted accordingly.

If you can't get out of bed, feel dizzy, or nauseated, call 911.

Symptom: Slow healing

Small cuts, bloody gums, infections, and sores usually heal in a few days, but white blood cells, which fight infection, are dependent on glucose levels being right. They can become slow to respond to infections when your glucose is high.

What to do: Inspect your skin twice a day, paying special attention to your feet. Nerve damage from diabetes can prevent you from feeling irritations that can develop into sores. If you find wounds that don't heal in a few days, see your doctor to discuss your diet or have your meds adjusted accordingly.

Symptom: Eye problems

What to do: When your blood sugar shifts, it can make the lens of your eye shrink or swell, causing the vision to blur or create little spots called floaters, says Ovalle. This in itself is usually not a big concern, but you should see an ophthalmologist to be sure. If part of your normal range of vision is missing, call 911.

Other symptoms to watch for: Shoulder pain, nausea, discomfort in arms, jaw, or chest

People with diabetes have a greater risk of heart disease, so these symptoms should not be ignored, even if they go away and come back. Also take note of shortness of breath, fainting, or breaking out in a cold sweat. Call 911 if you have any of these symptoms.

How to Stay on Track

Testing every day is the best way to track your blood sugar. Ask your doctor what your target blood sugar range should be. Find out what to do if your blood sugar lands in the high or low range or when you should test your urine for ketones. You should call your doctor right away if your urine contains ketones.