

# How to Treat Insulin Shock

**Four Parts:**   [Spotting the signs of insulin shock](#)   [Responding quickly](#)   [Getting help from emergency services](#)   [Avoiding future instances of insulin shock](#)

A person suffering from diabetes can experience low blood sugar, as diabetes prevents the body from regulating blood sugar levels. Early warning symptoms of insulin shock include the shakes, confusion or aggression, cold and sweaty skin, paleness and feeling tired, hungry or claiming to have a headache. All of this can happen rapidly when the blood sugar levels are low. And once a diabetic person goes into shock, he or she is liable to quickly become unconscious. Insulin shock is a medical emergency in need of immediate response.

Note: This article is for a person without knowledge of diabetes care who needs to give first aid to a diabetic. If you are not familiar with invasive testing for blood sugar levels or giving injections, do not attempt either; as such, these are not covered in this article.

## Part 1

### Spotting the signs of insulin shock

**1 Recognize the symptoms of insulin shock.** If a person begins to show any or all of the following symptoms, respond quickly to decrease the severity of the attack:

- The shakes
- Dizziness
- Weakness
- The sweats
- Headache
- Nervousness
- Moodiness (a key sign; may be irritability, confusion, anger, aggression, etc.)
- Increased heart rate
- Hunger
- Pale skin
- Disoriented behavior.

**2 Expect the symptoms to begin and progress very quickly.** Be aware that sometimes people mistake a diabetic person as someone who has drunk too much alcohol (aggression, slurring, sweating, odor, etc.). It may help to look for a medic bracelet but, provided you are safe, try to attend to helping the person regardless of the cause of the behavior.

- If the person is very aggressive, get help. It can be difficult sometimes to argue with a very determined and rather strong person about the need to ingest glucose quickly, so more help is always safer.

## Part 2

### Responding quickly

**1 Respond quickly.** Bring the blood sugar level back up to normal. If the person is conscious:

- Give the sugary food such as honey, sugar, hard glucose candies (like barley sugar, boiled sweets) or a sugary drink (fruit juice, soda or milk).
- If you have access to glucose tablets, give the person 3 glucose tablets, or follow the package instructions.

**2 Wait for 5 minutes.** Within 5 minutes, the symptoms of low blood sugar should be improving. During this time, ask the person to rest. Reassure the person as much as possible.

- If the symptoms abate, ask the person to keep resting for a while. This has been an emergency situation and the person needs to take it easy. Follow up with a sandwich and a banana/cookies, or similar food that takes a

longer time to digest. This will stop the energy crash that can occur after eating lots of sugar.

**3 When the sugar levels are at an acceptable level, continue with the person's normal meal schedule.** If you are concerned about how the person got to this state, you may need to follow up by taking the person to see a doctor for further examination and advice. Indeed, it is strongly recommended that the person see a doctor anyway, as he or she has experienced a medical emergency.

### Part 3 Getting help from emergency services

**1 Call an ambulance if the attack is too severe.** If the person's blood sugar level does not improve within 10-15 minutes after giving glucose, if the person becomes unconscious or starts having a seizure, call an ambulance.

- Over the phone, describe clearly what is happening.
- Explain what you have already given the person and how the person has reacted.
- Monitor the person's airway, breathing and circulation. If conscious, reassure the person.
- If the blood sugar level is still low, have the person consume some more glucose/sugary product.
- If possible, keep the person sitting or lying down to rest.
- Stay with and monitor the airway, breathing and circulation until emergency services arrive.

**2 If the person is unconscious, do not give anything to drink.** Liquid could cause the person to choke. Instead, monitor the person's airway, breathing and circulation. Place the person in the stable side position (recovery position) and keep monitoring the person until the ambulance arrives.

- Reassure even if you think the person cannot hear or understand you. At some level, just knowing someone is there taking care of you can be of great help.

### Part 4 Avoiding future instances of insulin shock

**1 Avoid the causes of insulin shock.** Insulin shock happens when blood sugar levels plummet. In most instances, this can be avoided. The following advice will help reduce the potential for experiencing insulin shock:

- Do not skip meals.
- Eat small meals throughout the day. Meals should be routinely timed and spaced at regular intervals.
- Avoid taking too much medicine or insulin.
- Keep from excessive bouts of exercise.
- Refrain from alcohol.

The causes that cannot be helped are reactions to new medications, aging and illness. The unfortunate fact is that sometimes it can happen for no reason at all. In this case, simply be prepared as best you can by always having a source of glucose with you and letting others know where they can find it in a hurry, if needed.

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### Warnings

- Do not try to administer insulin. Only a trained medical professional should attempt this.

### Sources and Citations

- [http://www.emedicinehealth.com/insulin\\_reaction/article\\_em.htm](http://www.emedicinehealth.com/insulin_reaction/article_em.htm) – research source