Ways to Lower the Risk of Low Blood Sugars

A low blood sugar is generally considered a blood sugar less than 70mg/dl. Some people may experience symptoms, such as feeling sweaty, shaky or that your heart is pounding, while others may not experience symptoms at all.

Low blood sugars are dangerous because when severe, they can cause mental confusion, loss of consciousness, or seizures. These severe symptoms may lead to many other unwanted effects.

Two of the most common causes of low blood sugars are:

- Missing a meal or eating less than usual
- Taking too much medication or taking medicine differently than prescribed

Missing a meal or eating less than usual:

Carbohydrates are the part of your food that gets broken down in the body as sugar. Because of this, it is carbohydrates and not only “sugar” that affects your diabetes control.

There are 2 important points to remember with meal planning:

- You need to eat controlled portions of carbohydrates (not eat too large a serving)
- You need to have consistent eating habits from day to day

By doing this, your diabetes will be better controlled and your diabetes medications will be able to work better and safer for you.

Taking too much medicine or taking medicine differently than prescribed:

There are many medicines taken for diabetes. Some come in pill form and some are injected. They all work differently in the body to help better control your blood sugars.

Because medicines are all different, some may need to be taken in relation to a meal time, while other medicines can be taken without regard to a meal. It’s important to know exactly how and when (which meals) to take each of your medicines.

Some medicines that need to be taken with a meal include, but are not limited to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Medicine</th>
<th>Purpose of Medicine</th>
<th>When to Take Medicine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Glipizide, Glyburide, or Glimepiride</td>
<td>Help lower the spike of blood sugar after a meal.</td>
<td>30 minutes before the meal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insulin Aspart (Novolog®)</td>
<td>Help lower the spike of blood sugar after a meal</td>
<td>5-10 minutes before the meal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Insulin Lispro (Humalog®)</td>
<td>Help lower the spike of blood sugar after a meal</td>
<td>15 minutes before or immediately after the meal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insulin Regular (Humulin R® or Novolin R®)</td>
<td>Help lower the spike of blood sugar after a meal</td>
<td>30-60 minutes before the meal</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Brought to you by VHA Choosing Wisely - Hypoglycemia Safety Initiative (Updated March 2016)