

## Section 5: Diets for Diabetes/Weight Control

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### Treatment of Hypoglycemia

#### Use:

Hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) can be one of the most common short-term complications of diabetes treatment. Proper treatment of hypoglycemia is essential to prevent overtreatment which may result in hyperglycemia.

#### General Principles & Guidelines:

1. In the frail older adult the symptoms of hypoglycemia are atypical compared to those displayed in younger populations. Symptoms of confusion or lethargy are more common than symptoms of anxiety, nausea, palpitations or sweating. Other possible symptoms and signs of hypoglycemia in the frail older adult includes altered behavior and mental function, irritability, disorientation, falls, generalized weakness, hallucinations, and hunger. Relaxing diet restrictions is one helpful approach to helping prevent hypoglycemia in the older adult.
2. The health care community's guidelines on treating hypoglycemia should be implemented whenever a low blood sugar is noted. If no guideline is available, the following "Rule of 15" is suggested.
3. An acceptable treatment of hypoglycemia is based on the "Rule of 15". When a low blood sugar is noted between 51 and 70 mg/dL, give 15 grams of glucose or carbohydrate initially and follow Steps A and B below. When a low blood sugar is noted to be 50 mg/dL or lower, give 20 to 30 grams of carbohydrate initially and then follow Steps A and B below. Each of the following food item provides 15 grams of carbohydrate:

- 1/2 cup of fruit juice
- 1/2 cup of regular soda
- 1 cup of skim milk
- 2 glucose tablets
- 1 tube of glucose gel
- 1 Tbsp of sugar
- 1 Tbsp of syrup

**Step A:** After treatment with 15 grams of carbohydrate, WAIT 15 MINUTES and recheck the blood sugar. If the blood sugar remains low, give another 15 grams of carbohydrate. Wait 15 minutes and retreat again as needed and repeat the process if necessary.

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- Step B:** If it is more than one hour to the next meal, a snack should be served that consists of 30 grams of carbohydrate plus a protein source such as a cheese sandwich. Blood glucose monitoring should continue until the meal is served.
4. In a health care setting, the traditional treatment for hypoglycemia has been the addition of table sugar to juice or other liquids to increase blood sugars. This is not recommended and may result in overtreatment of hypoglycemia resulting in a high blood sugar followed by a sudden low blood sugar.
  5. Causes for hypoglycemia includes:
    - Too much insulin or oral hypoglycemic agents
    - Improper timing of diabetic medication to meals consumed
    - Inadequate food intake
    - Skipped meals or snacks
    - Unplanned increase in physical activities or exercise
    - Intensive insulin therapy
    - Alcohol intake alone without consuming food