



# DIABETES EMERGENCIES: SIGNS, SYMPTOMS, AND CARE



If you have diabetes, it's possible to experience a diabetes emergency, despite being careful and doing everything right. High or low blood sugar levels can lead to an emergency situation. Below are some symptoms to look out for and what to do if you notice any of them.

	LOW BLOOD SUGAR (HYPOGLYCEMIA)	HIGH BLOOD SUGAR (HYPERGLYCEMIA)
<b>Who can be affected?</b>	Those who need insulin or take other diabetes medicines that can cause low blood sugar	Any person who has diabetes
<b>How fast does it happen?</b>	Rapidly, over minutes or hours	Slowly, over hours or days
<b>What are the symptoms?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fatigue, shakiness</li> <li>• Headache</li> <li>• Hunger</li> <li>• Cold, clammy skin; sweating</li> <li>• Sudden double vision or blurred vision</li> <li>• Pounding heart, confusion, irritability; person may appear drunk</li> <li>• Loss of consciousness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequent urination</li> <li>• Intense thirst</li> <li>• Blurred vision</li> <li>• Signs of ketoacidosis, such as: rapid breathing; fruity-smelling breath; hot, flushed, dry skin; restlessness or drowsiness; loss of appetite; belly pain or vomiting; confusion</li> <li>• Loss of consciousness</li> </ul>
<b>What should you do?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the person loses consciousness, call 911. If the person is conscious, have the person eat or drink something that contains sugar. If symptoms don't improve, call the doctor immediately.</li> <li>• If you've been taught how to give glucagon to a person who is having a low blood sugar emergency, do so. Always make sure the glucagon has not expired.</li> </ul>	If there are signs of ketoacidosis, call the doctor immediately. If the person loses consciousness, call 911.

If you are unsure about the cause of the diabetic emergency in a person who uses medicine, have the person eat or drink something that contains sugar, like glucose tablets, hard candy, honey or sugar dissolved in water, fruit juice, or a soft drink with sugar. Do not give an unconscious person anything to eat or drink.

*Note: Symptoms may vary. If you have diabetes, ask your doctor what your safe blood sugar range is.*



## DIABETES COMPLICATIONS

When you have diabetes, you are at risk of developing other health problems, called complications. This is especially true if your blood sugar levels stay high. Over time, high blood sugar can damage many parts of your body. It can lead to a variety of problems, including problems with your:

- **Eyes.** High blood sugar levels may cause temporary blurred vision. Blurred vision, floaters, or flashes of light may be a sign of diabetic retinopathy, which can lead to severe vision loss. Having diabetes also puts you at risk for cataracts and glaucoma.
- **Heart and blood vessels.** High blood sugar damages the lining of blood vessels. This is called hardening of the arteries, or atherosclerosis. It can lead to stroke, heart attack, peripheral arterial disease, or heart failure.
- **Nerves.** High blood sugar levels can damage nerves throughout your body. This damage is called diabetic neuropathy. There are different types of neuropathy. They may be caused by damage to nerves that sense things like pain or touch or that control things like your heartbeat, digestion, or blood pressure. Nerve damage can be painful, especially in the feet.
- **Feet and skin.** You may have less feeling in your feet. This means that you can injure your feet and not know it. Common infections from blisters, ingrown toenails, small cuts, or other problems can quickly become more serious when you have diabetes.
- **Kidneys.** High blood sugar can damage tiny blood vessels in your kidneys that help filter waste from your blood. This kidney damage is called diabetic kidney disease (sometimes called diabetic nephropathy). You may not have any symptoms until the damage is severe. Then you may notice swelling in your feet or legs or all over your body.

## INFECTIONS RELATED TO DIABETES

High blood sugar from diabetes can affect the body's immune system. The immune system is the body's natural defense system that helps fight infections. People with high blood sugar from diabetes can be more severely affected by common infections, such as influenza and pneumonia. They also are more likely to be infected with unusual organisms, such as Gram-negative bacteria or fungi.

### PREVENTION

You can help prevent or delay complications by keeping your blood sugar in a target range. You also need regular medical checkups to look for early signs of complications. If complications are treated early, the damage may be stopped, slowed, or possibly reversed.

## LONG-TERM HEALTH PROBLEMS

### DIABETIC RETINOPATHY

Diabetes can damage the small blood vessels in the retina, which is the part of the eye that sends images to your brain. This is called retinopathy, and it can lead to poor vision or blindness.

Retinopathy does not usually cause symptoms at first. When you do have symptoms, they can include blurred or distorted vision or having a hard time reading. You may have floaters, which are shadows or dark objects that “float” across your vision. You may see flashes of light. Because you may not have symptoms until retinopathy is severe, see your eye doctor on a regular basis. The sooner you know about it, the easier it is to treat it, and the more likely you are to prevent vision loss. Diabetic retinopathy has no cure, but controlling diabetes can help stop it from getting worse. If your retina is not badly hurt, laser treatment or surgery can help prevent more vision loss.

### DIABETIC NEUROPATHY

Over time, high blood sugar from diabetes can damage your nerves. This is called diabetic neuropathy. It can affect the following nerves:



- **The nerves that give you the sense of touch, heat, and position, mainly those in your feet and legs.** The longer the nerve is, the more likely it is to be damaged by diabetes. This can lead to serious foot problems, such as sores, infection, and bone and joint deformities. It is the most common form of neuropathy. Symptoms include:

- » Tingling, tightness, or burning, shooting, or stabbing pain in the feet, hands, or other parts of the body.
- » Numbness or less feeling, most often in the feet.
- » Weakness and loss of balance and coordination.

- **The part of the nervous system that you do not control.** This includes the nerves that control your heart rate, blood pressure, body temperature, vision, digestion, and other functions. If these nerves are damaged, you may:

- » Notice digestion problems like bloating, heartburn, or diarrhea.
- » Sweat a lot at night or while eating certain foods. You may also sweat only a little, especially in your feet and legs.
- » Not know when you have to urinate.
- » Have sexual problems.
- » Feel dizzy and weak when you stand up or sit up.
- » Not know your blood sugar is low.

- **One nerve or group of nerves.** This can cause muscle weakness and pain, mainly in the wrist, thigh, or foot. It may also affect the nerves of the back and chest and those that control the eye muscles. This rare form usually occurs suddenly. You may:

- » Have pain or weakness in one part of your body, such as a wrist, thigh, or foot.
- » Have pain in and around one of your eyes, difficulty moving your eyes, and double vision.

There is no cure for diabetic neuropathy, but you can keep it from getting worse by keeping your blood sugar within a target range. Your doctor may suggest medicine or physical therapy for pain. Take good care of your feet to help avoid foot infections.

### DIABETIC KIDNEY DISEASE

Diabetic kidney disease is kidney damage caused by having high blood sugar for a long time. This affects how the kidneys filter fluids, and it lets protein that should stay in the blood pass into the urine. If not treated, this can lead to kidney failure. To help find it early, your doctor may do tests that check how well your kidneys are filtering your blood and how much protein is in your urine.

You have no symptoms at first. A little bit of protein in the urine is the first sign of kidney damage. When your kidneys work poorly, your blood pressure may go up and you may have swelling, at first in your feet and legs. Medicine that lowers blood pressure and protects the kidneys can help. To prevent kidney damage or keep it from getting worse, eat healthy foods, exercise, limit alcohol, don't smoke, and keep your blood sugar within a target range. Also, talk to your doctor or dietitian about how much protein is best for you.

### HEART DISEASE

Experts do not fully understand how diabetes affects the heart. Many things can lead to heart disease, including high blood sugar, insulin resistance, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure. But genetics and lifestyle may also affect a person's risk. For example, if you smoke, you are at a higher risk for heart and blood vessel disease than someone who does not smoke. To help prevent or delay heart disease, take the medicine your doctor suggests, exercise, don't smoke, control your blood pressure, and eat healthy.



## REDUCE YOUR RISK

The most important thing you can do is keep your blood sugar under control. To do this, take your insulin or other diabetes medicines as your doctor tells you, check your blood sugar level often, follow your diet for diabetes, exercise, and see your doctor on a regular basis. Seeing your doctor is very important because you may have no symptoms from these problems. The earlier you can treat them, the more likely you can avoid complications and prevent the problem from getting worse.

## NO-COST DIABETES EDUCATION & SUPPORT

You **CAN** be successful in managing your diabetes. Community First is here to help. Our [Diabetes in Control: Diabetes Management Program](#) is a no-cost Health & Wellness program exclusively for Community First Members. This program helps you learn more about diabetes and empowers you to take control of your health. Join this no-cost program today, and you may be eligible for Value-Added Services like gift card incentives, a complimentary 4-month YMCA membership, home visits, and more.\*

*\*Limitations and restrictions apply. Contact a Community First Health Educator for more information about Value-Added Services.*

## TO JOIN

- **Visit:** [CommunityFirstHealthPlans.com/Health-and-Wellness-Programs](https://CommunityFirstHealthPlans.com/Health-and-Wellness-Programs)
- **Call:** 210-358-6055
- **Email:** [healthyhelp@cfhp.com](mailto:healthyhelp@cfhp.com)

**Community First Case Management services are also available to Members at no cost. Diabetes does not have to control your life. People who take an active role in learning about diabetes are the most successful in preventing or delaying diabetes complications. You can do it. We can help.**

### Source

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