

# Diabetes Medicines: *Glucagon*

Glucagon is emergency medicine used to treat severe hypoglycemia (very low blood glucose). This handout explains why and when to use this important medicine.

Glucagon is packaged in kits.

Two common brand-name kits are the **Glucagon Emergency Kit™** and the **GlucaGen HypoKit™**.



## If you use insulin...

**ALWAYS** have a glucagon kit on hand. A kit contains the glucagon medicine (a powder and a liquid to be mixed together when needed), a syringe to inject it with, and instructions. You might want to leave kits in several places—home, work, school, etc. Store kits at room temperature. (Don't leave a kit in a hot or cold car, for example.)

**Keep it current.** Check the date on each kit, and replace it when necessary. Don't use glucagon after its expiration date.

**Share this handout** with the people who live, work, and study with you. Help them practice mixing and injecting glucagon according to the instructions.

## If you live, work, or study with someone who uses insulin...

**Know where the glucagon kit is stored.**

A kit contains the glucagon medicine (a powder and a liquid to be mixed together when needed), a syringe to inject it with, and instructions.

**Read the back of this handout** to learn why when to use glucagon.

**Practice mixing and injecting glucagon**

following the instructions in the kit. (Use an orange for the practice shots.)

**Be prepared to give a glucagon shot**, even if you're not comfortable doing so. You could save a life!

## Why is glucagon important?

People who take insulin are at risk for episodes of severe hypoglycemia (low blood glucose). During such an episode, brain cells don't get the fuel (glucose) they need. Unless blood glucose is quickly raised, it can cause brain damage or even death.

Glucagon is one way to quickly raise blood glucose. It's a natural hormone that helps the liver release glucose into the bloodstream. It's the fastest and safest way to raise blood glucose when a person is unconscious.

## When should glucagon be used?

A person who has diabetes and is using insulin needs an injection (shot) of glucagon if their blood glucose has dropped so low that the person is:

- Unable to drink, swallow, or eat sugar (or sugar-sweetened products)
- Refusing to eat or drink quick-acting sugar products
- Angry or aggressive
- Having seizures or convulsions
- Unconscious or unresponsive

Ideally, the person's blood glucose is tested first, to make sure the symptoms are due to hypoglycemia. But since severe hypoglycemia is an emergency, and since the person helping may not know how to test blood, this isn't crucial. When in doubt, use glucagon! Glucagon is safe, even if it's given inappropriately.

## What should I know about my glucagon kit?

Glucagon is packaged in kits with all of the equipment you need for preparing and giving the medicine. These kits include instructions and unmixed glucagon medicine. Here are some storage tips:

- **Consider having more than one kit.** That way, you can keep one at home, one at school, one for grandma's house, and so on. Take a kit with you if you're camping or traveling.
- **Keep the kit at room temperature,** out of direct sunlight or extreme cold, and away from moisture.
- **Note the expiration date on the kit and ask for a refill before the kit expires.** Don't mix or use old glucagon after the expiration date printed on the kit or the vial.

Once you have your new (refill) glucagon kit, use the expired kit to practice mixing and drawing up glucagon. It's a good idea for family members and caretakers to practice this skill so they'll be ready in an emergency. Practice by injecting an orange. (Throw the orange away when you are finished practicing.)



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