

Do You Bolt Awake at 3 AM?

Low Blood Sugar Symptoms May Be To Blame

You're exhausted and you need your eight hours of sleep, but you suddenly bolt awake around 3 or 4 AM, energy coursing through your veins and mind churning anxiously. What gives? These early morning wake-up calls often are simply one of many low blood sugar symptoms.

Why Low Blood Sugar Symptoms Can Cause You to Be Awake at 3 AM

Sleeping through the night represents a long period without food when blood sugar can drop too low. This is bad news for the brain, which depends on glucose for energy. The brain is highly active at night, transforming short-term memory into long-term memory,[1] and carrying out repair and regeneration.[2] When blood sugar drops too low, the body sounds the alarm bells to protect the brain.

In response, the adrenal glands, two walnut-shaped glands that sit atop the kidneys, release stress hormones. These stress hormones raise blood sugar back to a safe level. Unfortunately, stress hormones also raise, well, stress. Hence the anxious awakening during night's darkest hours.

Eating at 3 AM Can Help You Fall Back to Sleep

A quick fix for this and other low blood sugar symptoms (below) can be as simple as eating a small amount of protein – with perhaps some fat thrown in – when you wake up too early. This could be a spoonful of nut butter, a few pieces of meat, or a hard-boiled egg. Some find this stabilizes blood sugar levels enough so they fall back asleep. Do not, however, eat something starchy at this time, such as bread or cereal, as it will spike blood sugar levels, causing them to drop too low again.

Daytime Tips to Avoid Waking Up at 3 AM

Although a quick snack may help you fall back asleep, it's better to prevent waking up in the first place. If you are waking up regularly at 3 AM, chances are you suffer other low blood sugar symptoms, such as:

- Sugar cravings
- Irritability, light-headedness, dizziness, or brain fog if meals are missed
- Lack of appetite or nausea in the morning
- Caffeine dependency for energy
- Eating to relieve fatigue
- Energy crash in the afternoon

A diet that stabilizes blood sugar levels by day will also sustain you during the night. To remedy your low blood sugar symptoms so you can sleep through the night again, consider implementing the following strategies:

- Eat a breakfast low in carbohydrates. This is hard for people with low blood sugar symptoms as they typically abhor the thought of eating in the morning, but it's mandatory for resolving your symptoms. Force yourself to eat a breakfast rich in protein, such as eggs and bacon (DO NOT eat a starchy breakfast, such as pancakes, pastries, or cereal), and you will soon find your morning appetite returns. It is healthy and normal to wake up hungry.
- Eat a little protein and fat every few hours to keep blood sugar levels stable. As your blood sugar handling improves, you will find you can go longer between snacks and meals without crashing.
- Adopt a lower-carbohydrate diet. People with low blood sugar symptoms typically eat a diet too high in carbohydrates: breads, pasta, rice, potatoes, desserts, sodas, coffee drinks, energy drinks, fruit, juices, and more. Everyone's daily carbohydrate needs differ, but stay under 150 grams a day starting -out, although you may need to go lower.
- Ditch the low-fat diet. Fats are like the big log that can sustain a fire for hours, whereas carbohydrates are like kindling, which burn quickly. A diet that includes ample natural fats (no processed vegetable oils or hydrogenated fats) will keep low blood sugar symptoms at bay so you can sleep through the night.

How do you know your diet is working, or if you need to adjust your carbohydrates lower? When your blood sugar is stable enough to fuel the brain's night shift, you'll no longer get that 3 A.M. wake up call!

[1] Guzman-Marin R, Suntsova N, Bashir T, Nienhuis R, Szymusiak R, McGinty D. Rapid eye movement sleep deprivation contributes to reduction of neurogenesis in the hippocampal dentate gyrus of the adult rat. *Sleep*. 2008 Feb 1;31(2):167-75.

[2] Gais S, Born J. Declarative memory consolidation: mechanisms acting during human sleep. *Learn Mem*. 2004 Nov-Dec;11(6):679-85.