

The Link Between Your Blood Sugar and Your Mood

By Rosemary Black

Irritable? Sleepy? Confused? Your feelings are closely tied to your blood sugar.

Feeling down? Or so irritable you could scream? Chances are that your blood sugar's too high or too low. And not surprisingly, it affects your mood.

"When diabetics have low blood sugar, they may not even act like themselves," says Olga Calof, MD, a board-certified endocrinologist in the Los Angeles area. "They may have behavioral changes that they don't even notice. It's different for every individual. And high blood sugars can also cause symptoms, too."

When your blood sugar drops too low, your brain is simply not getting enough of the sugar it needs to function. And when this happens, irritability is often an early symptom, explains Howard Shapiro, D.O, author of the forthcoming *Eat and Beat Diabetes with Picture Perfect Weight Loss*. This irritability is often accompanied by sweating, a feeling of weakness, shakiness, and difficulty concentrating. And if the blood sugar isn't brought back up to speed, the diabetic can suffer headaches and mental confusion.

"It could even look like the person is on drugs," Shapiro says. "They could have slurred speech."

It's not unheard of during an episode of hypoglycemia for a person to feel dizzy and even to have a rapid heartbeat, says Calof. While some symptoms may not be obvious to the diabetic, those around him see mood changes right away.

"Your spouse may notice that you are moody and cranky," Calof says. "Some people say they can see that a spouse's sugar is low just by their facial expression."

When your blood sugar is high, it can be mood-altering, too. It's typical to feel irritated, explains Kenneth Gorfinkle, Ph.D., assistant clinical professor of psychology at the Naomi Berrie Diabetes Center at New York-Presbyterian/Columbia in New York City. It's also possible to suffer from poor concentration and to be a little fatigued or short tempered. All of which can quickly put a person into a bad mood.

But one's mood can also be affected simply because of the diabetes and the worry over blood sugar levels. If you blood sugar shoots up too high, or if it is so low you need to treat it, you can feel guilty and afraid. There's fear over what complications could ensue over time, and fear of a loss of control during an episode of hypoglycemia. "You can have feelings of self-chastisement and self-pity," Gorfinkle explains. "And this leads to a very unhappy mood."

Occasionally, the subtle mood changes in someone with a high blood sugar may not even be apparent to those around him, says Calof. The person may feel just slightly sleepy and dehydrated, but nothing else. The problem, though, is that high blood sugar over time can cause devastating complications.

Rx for Low Blood Sugar

Recognize that hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) can be dangerous and must be treated promptly. It also can be prevented if you spread your carbohydrate intake throughout the day, and eat small meals rather than just three large ones, says Shapiro. Since both caffeine (and alcohol, on an empty stomach) can cause the blood sugar to drop, be vigilant about your intake of coffee as well as alcoholic beverages, Shapiro recommends. Keep fruit juice, sugar tablets, and hard candy around for episodes of hypoglycemia.

Rx for High Blood Sugar

Frequent blood sugar testing, intensive medication therapy and paying close attention to what you eat can help you to avoid high blood sugars. Remember, the feeling of a high blood sugar may not be as disconcerting as the feeling of a low blood sugar, but the long term health consequences can be debilitating.