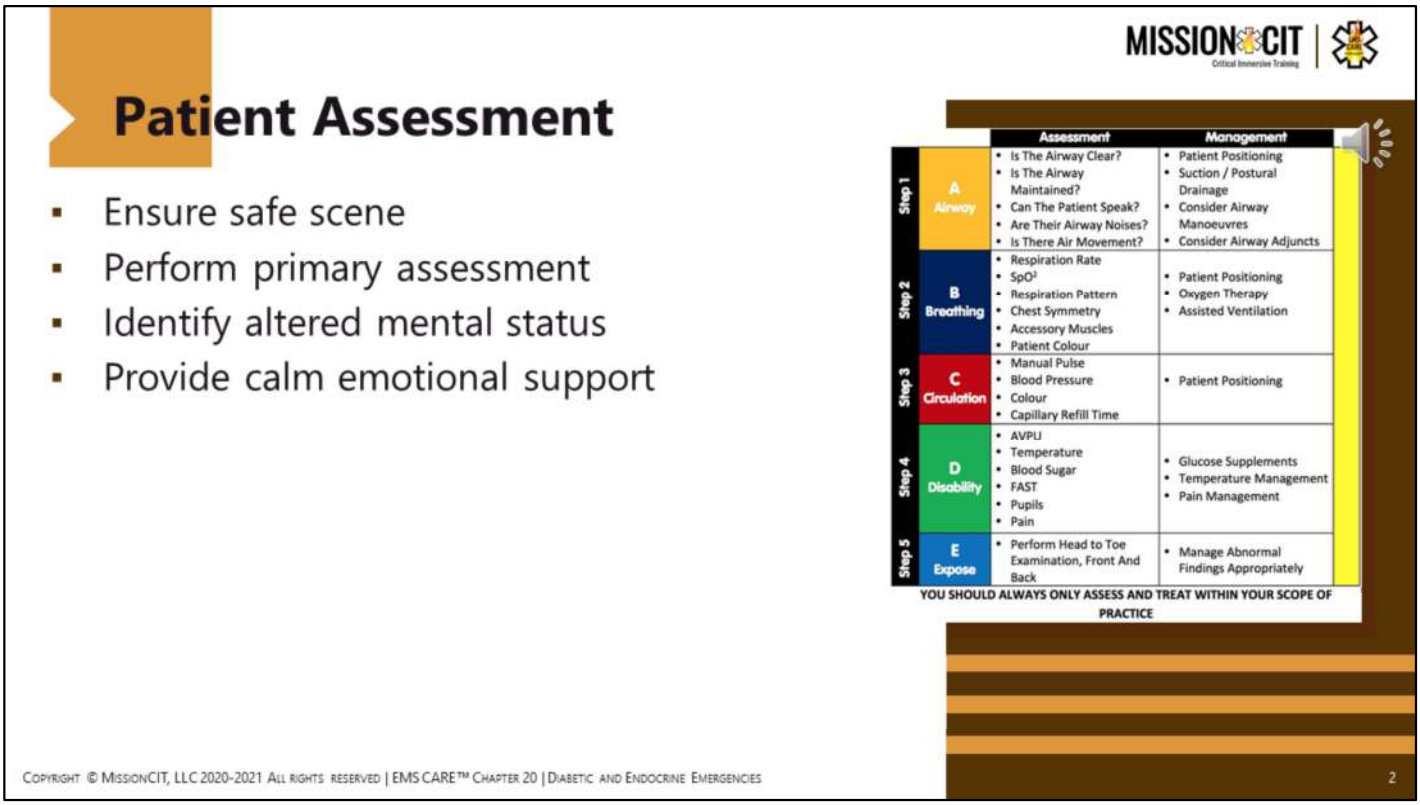
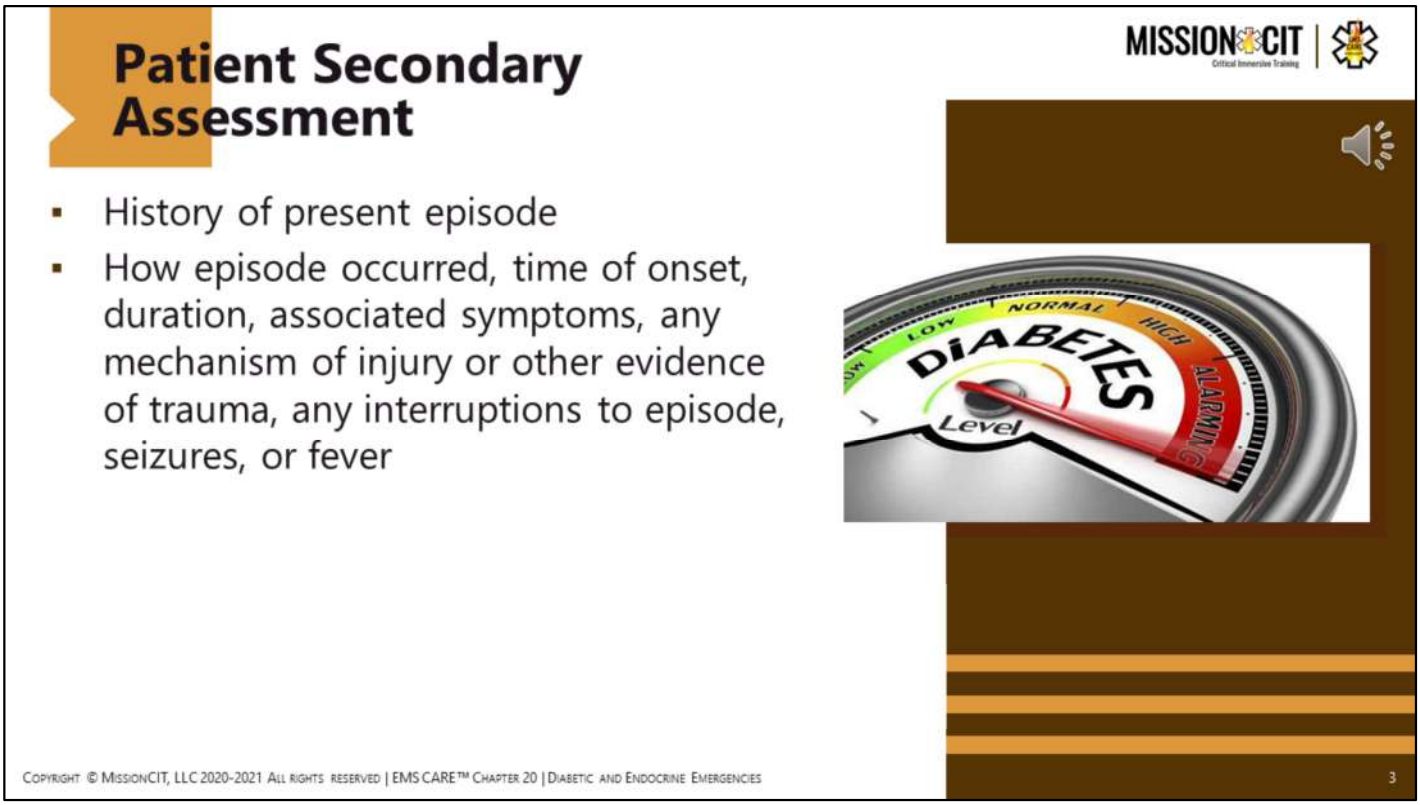


A successful medical evaluation depends on beneficial interactions between the patient and the EMS team. In this lesson, we will review the assessment of a diabetes patient.



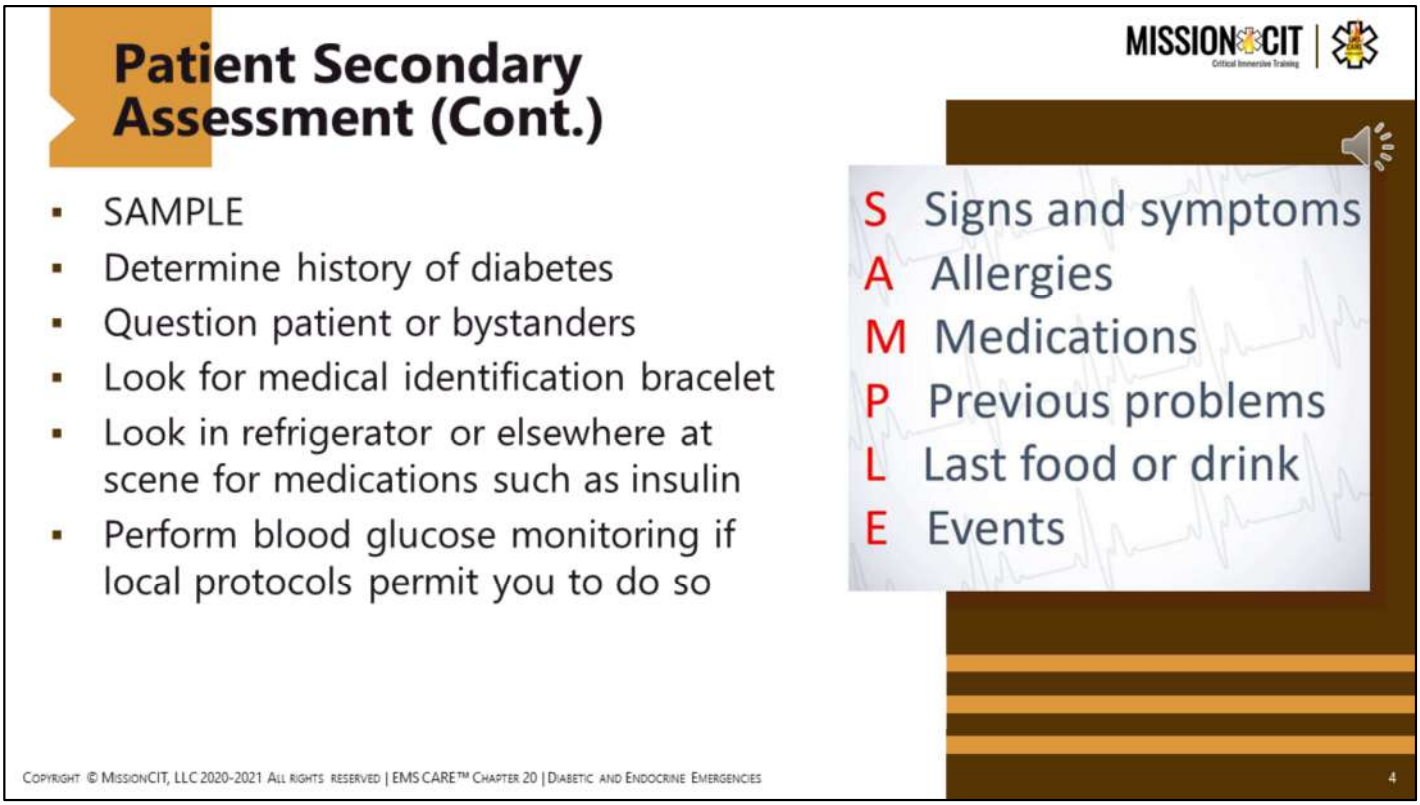
The basic elements in the assessment of a diabetic patient are safety, primary assessment, patient history, and physical exam. In addition, perform an assessment of the patient's ability to swallow, and the vital signs. Be sure to identify an altered mental status and provide calm emotional support.



Establish a history of the present episode.

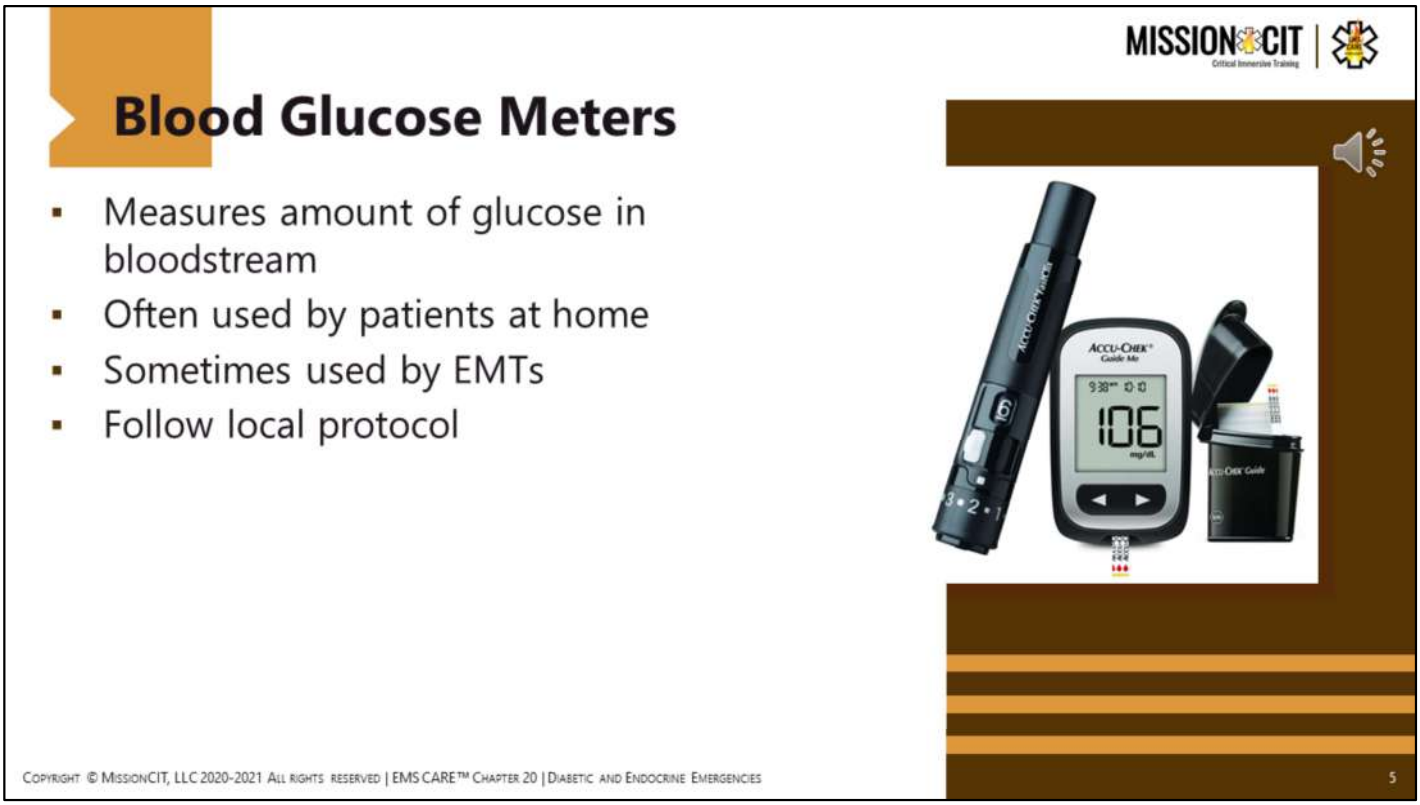
Specifically, explore:

- How the episode occurred
- The time of onset
- Its duration
- Any associated symptoms
- Any mechanism of injury or other evidence of trauma, and
- Any interruptions to the episode, seizures, or fever



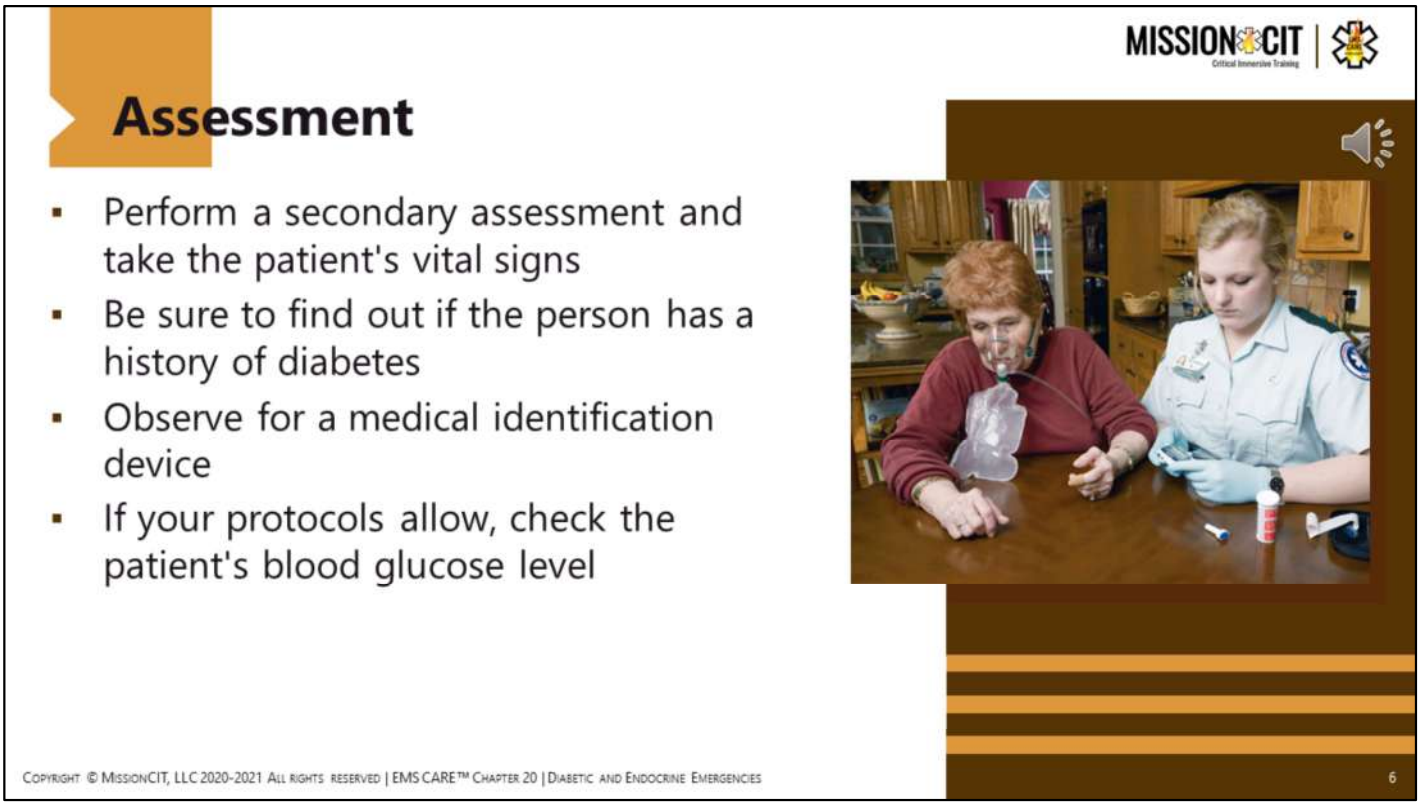
So, when ready to perform a secondary assessment, the SAMPLE mnemonic is a good place to start. An appropriate process to follow includes:

- Determine the patient's history of diabetes
- Question the patient and/or bystanders
- Look for a medical identification bracelet
- Look in the refrigerator or elsewhere at the scene for medications such as insulin, and
- Perform blood glucose monitoring if your local protocols permit you to do so



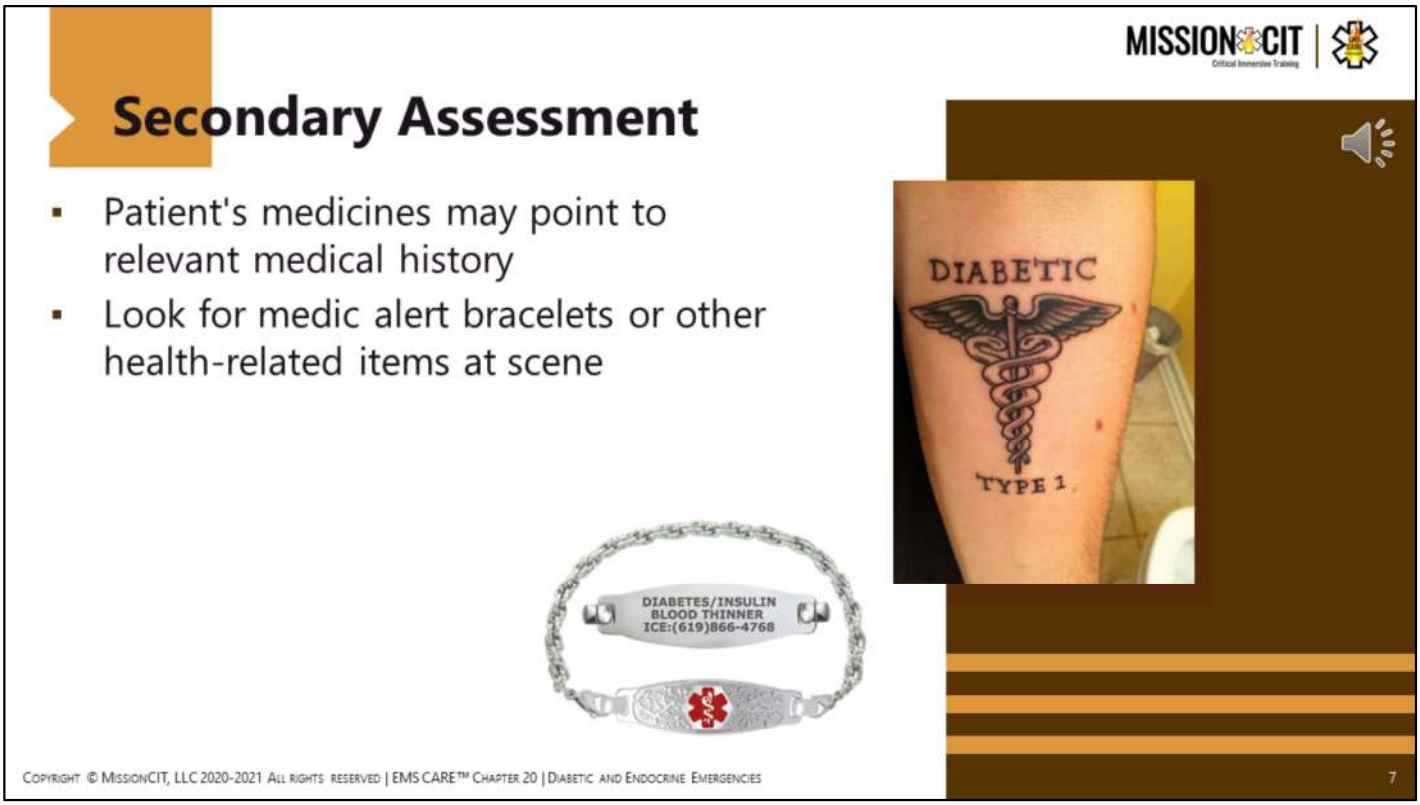
During the secondary assessment, if your local protocol permits, use a Blood Glucose Meter to establish the patient's blood sugar level.

The device measures the amount of glucose in the bloodstream. It is often used by patients at home. And sometimes used by EMTs.



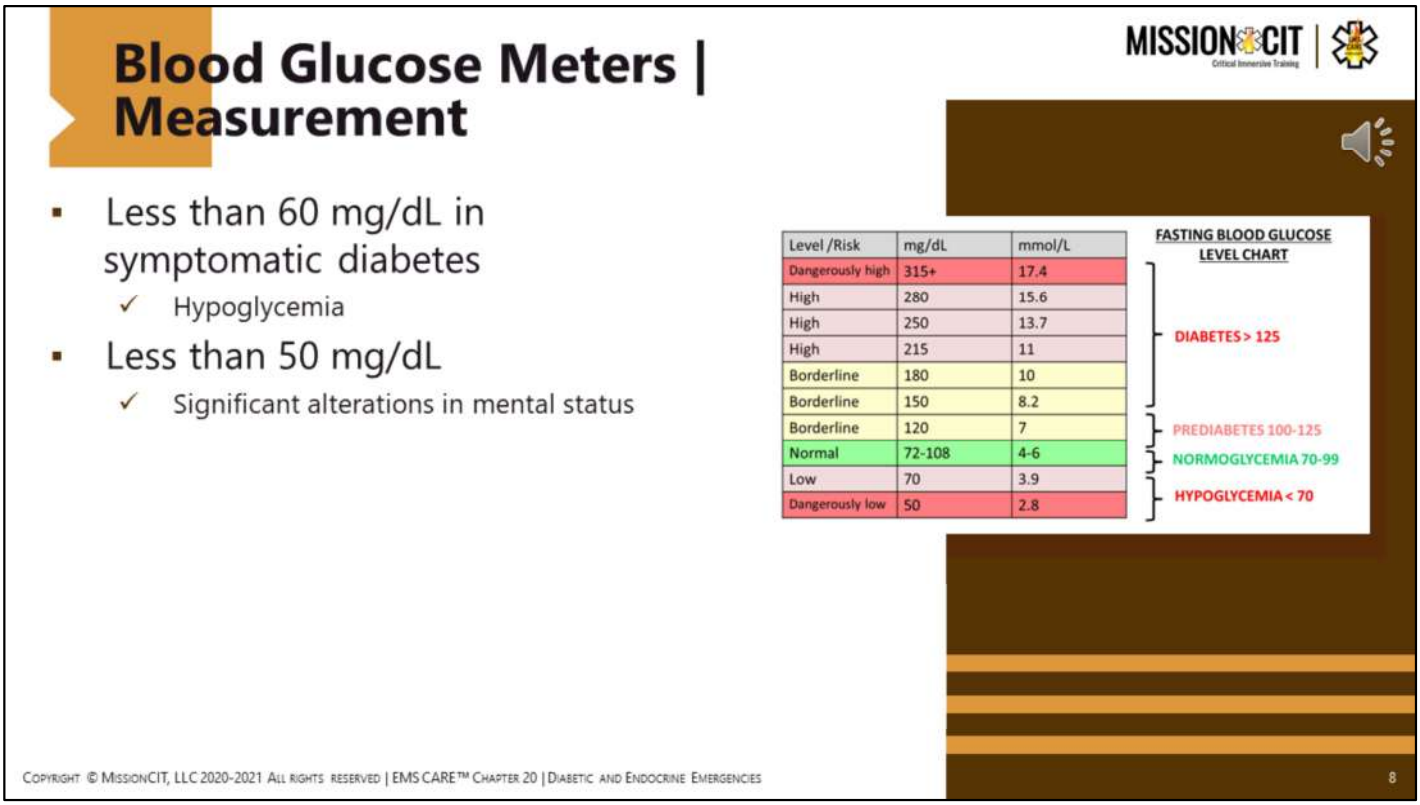
If you can use a blood glucose meter or glucometer; follow these 8 steps:

1. Don appropriate PPE.
2. To check the patient’s blood sugar level, gather your blood glucose meter, a test strip, and your lancing device.
3. Turn on the meter and prepare a test strip as outlined in your owner's booklet. Many glucometers turn on automatically when a strip is inserted.
4. Choose your spot—don't check from the same finger all the time. Using the side of the fingertip may be less painful than the pads.
5. Prepare the lancing device according to its mechanism, then lance the fingertip or other approved site to get a drop of blood.
6. Touch and hold the test strip opening to the drop until it has absorbed enough blood to begin the test.
7. View the test result and record.
8. Discard the used lancet properly.



During the secondary assessment, looking at the patient's medicines may point to relevant medical history. And look for medic alert bracelets or other health-related items at the scene.

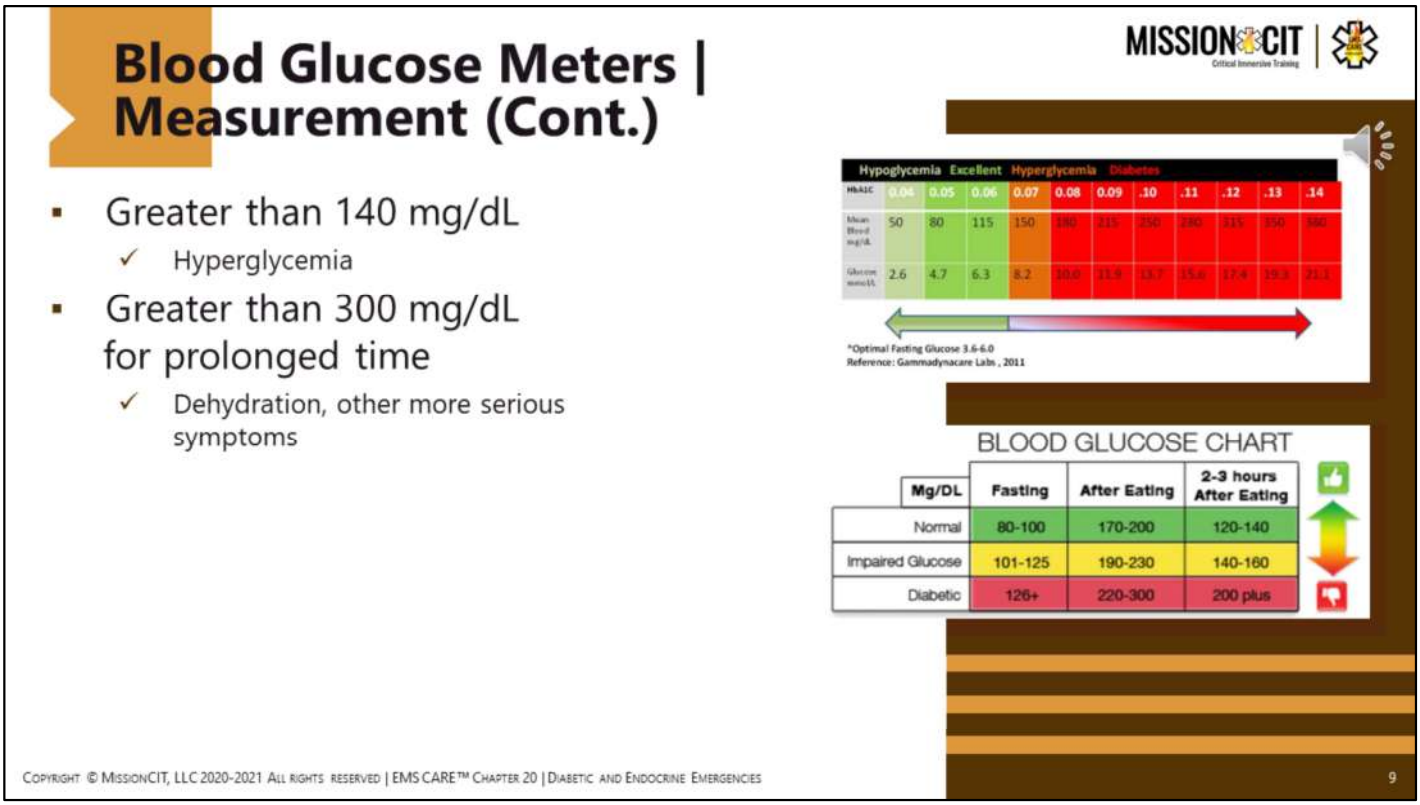
Some patients may even have a medic alert tattoo.



So, if you have obtained a blood glucose level, what do the numbers mean. Well, it depends on when the patient had their last meal. Most charts will show you the 'Fasting Blood Glucose level,' as does the chart on this page.

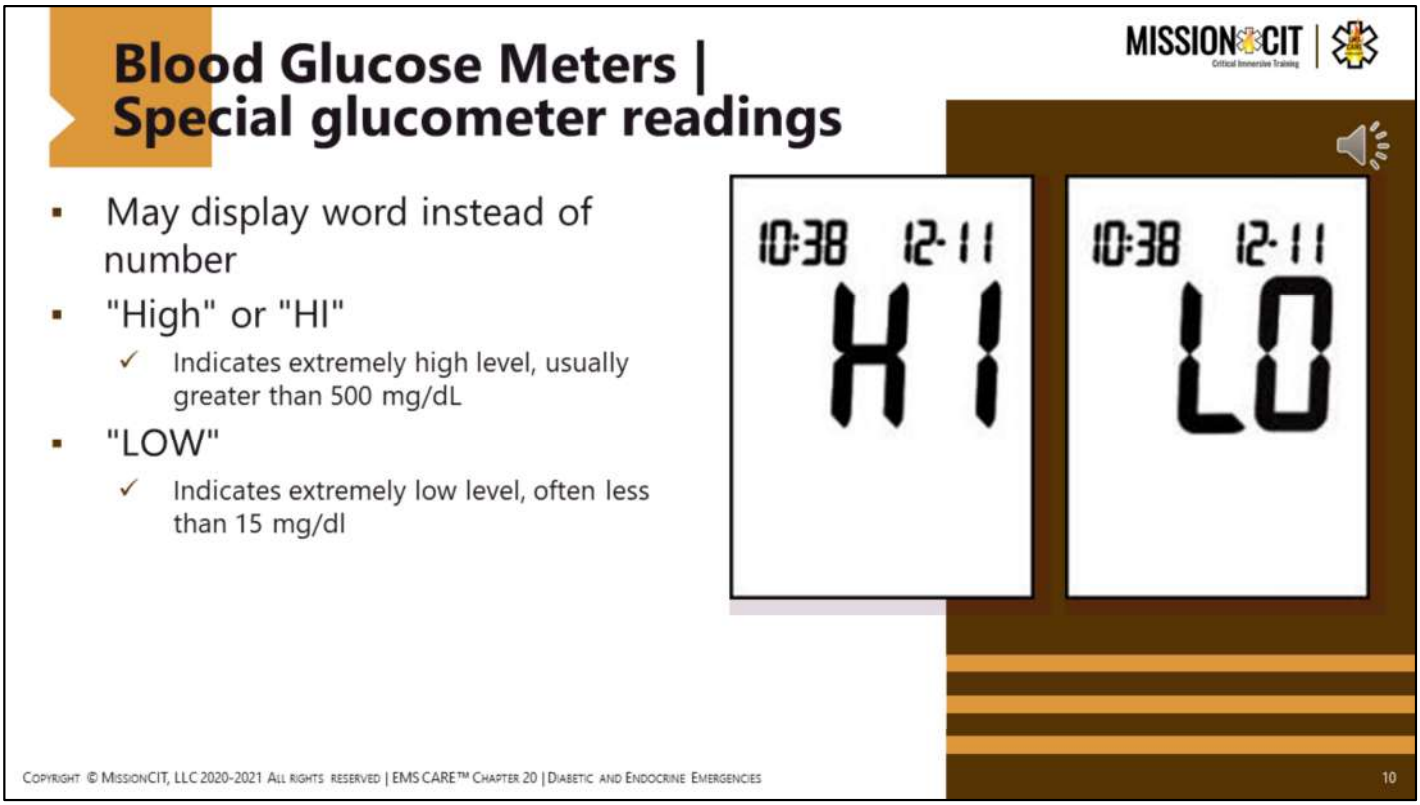
For the patient with a glucose level less than 70, regardless of when they have eaten, their blood sugar is low, and you will likely have to take action.

If the patient glucose level is Less than 60 milligrams per deciliter, they are in symptomatic diabetes. In less than 50 milligrams per deciliter, the patient is hypoglycemic and likely to have an altered mental status.



So, this time, your patient's blood glucose level is 155. Is this a problem? What action should you take? Well, if they just had a cheeseburger and apple pie, chances are that the blood glucose level is not an issue. So take care to understand when, and what food they last ate.

On the other hand, if the reading is over 300, the patient needs medical attention. Per your protocol, discuss the next steps and how to proceed.



So, when the glucometer's reading is displaying words, your patient likely has a problem. Now is a good time to retest in a different finger or preferably on the other hand. If the results are the same, you need to take the action we advise in the next lesson.

As we discussed before, the low reading is particularly troubling and likely requires oral glucose. Your patient may be in an altered mental status, and you may need backup.



Without blood glucose monitoring capabilities, it can be difficult to differentiate hyperglycemia from hypoglycemia. If the diagnosis is unclear, should you administer oral glucose? Why or why not? Discuss on the forum or with your instructor.

That's it for the Diabetes Assessment lesson. The next section will discuss diabetic patient care.