

Dietetics Department
Patient Information



The Information Standard Certified Member

Information

If you need this information in large print, easy read, on audiotape or in another language please call 0800 7838058 or e-mail pals@dchft.nhs.uk

If you wish to obtain a list of the sources used to develop this information leaflet please call 0800 7838058 or e-mail patient.info@dchft.nhs.uk

Author: Sandra Hood
Role: Diabetes Dietitian
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Hypoglycaemia

Information for people with diabetes

Hypoglycaemia or hypo is another name for low blood sugar – that is less than 4 mmol/L (millimoles per litre). Certain anti-diabetic medications can cause hypos but if the diabetes is diet controlled hypoglycaemia will not occur.

Why does it occur?

- Not eating enough carbohydrate or missing a meal
- Injecting too much insulin
- Wrong timing or amount of certain anti-diabetic medications
- Exercising without eating extra carbohydrate
- Drinking too much alcohol

What are the symptoms?

- Sweating
- Feeling hungry
- Anxiety and irritability
- Tingling lips
- Going pale
- Fast pulse and palpitations
- Headache
- Trembling

What to do

At the first signs of a hypo, or if you see that you have a blood glucose result less than 4 mmol/L, you must have something to eat or drink.

Step 1:

Take the simplest food that is quickly absorbed, something sugary such as:

- 5 - 7 glucose tablets/4 - 5 Glucotabs®
- 3 - 4 rounded teaspoons of sugar
- 3 - 4 jelly babies
- Glass of coke, not diet (150-200 mls)
- Glass of fruit juice, unsweetened (150-200mls)
- 1½ – 2 Glucogel® tubes

Wait ten to fifteen minutes and test your blood glucose level again to make sure it is above 4 mmol/L. If your blood glucose level remains below 4 mmol/L, repeat Step 1 again. This may need to be repeated up to 3 times.

Step 2:

Once blood glucose level is above 4 mmol/L, eat your meal if it is due or a small snack as soon as possible and make sure it includes an extra portion of carbohydrate. Take your insulin and diabetes medications as normal if due.

Examples of snacks for Step 2 are:

- a sandwich
- a scone
- large banana
- a cake
- a bowl of cereal
- biscuits and milk

If your blood glucose level continues to drop you could become uncooperative or aggressive and ultimately unconscious. If you lose consciousness, someone needs to call for help.

- Call for an ambulance
- If there is Glucagon available, this can be given by intramuscular (IM) injection

Once you are more alert, follow Step 1 and then Step 2. If you had lost consciousness, you will be admitted to hospital as the hypoglycaemic effects can persist for 12-24 hours and you need to be closely monitored.

Points to remember

- After a hypo, you are more likely to have another hypo in the next 12-24 hours so be extra alert
- Carry sugar or glucose tablets with you at all times
- Always carry diabetic identification
- Inform friends and colleagues what to do in the event of a hypo
- Remember when treating a hypo to always follow sugary foods with a starchy carbohydrate or the next meal if it's due
- Take your insulin or anti-diabetic medicines as normal if due

Useful contacts. If you have questions, please ask a Diabetes Dietitian or Diabetes UK.

Dorset County Hospital Diabetes Centre
Tel: **01305 255130**

Diabetes UK Careline

Tel: **0345 123 2399** (charges apply, see website for details)

Email: careline@diabetes.org.uk