

**Patient
Information**

Hypoglycaemia

Introduction

This leaflet provides information for people with diabetes, about having a hypoglycaemic (low blood glucose) episode.

What is hypoglycaemia?

Hypoglycaemia (known as 'hypo') is when your blood glucose level is less than 4 mmol/L. The short saying to help you remember this is '4 is the floor'. Hypoglycaemia can happen when you are treated with insulin or some diabetes tablets for the following reasons:

- Physical activity
- Too much insulin / tablets
- Too little food / missed / late meals
- Alcohol
- Hot weather
- Sometimes no obvious cause.

What are the signs and symptoms of hypoglycaemia?

A 'hypo' can be mild, moderate or severe, but must always be treated quickly.

Hypoglycaemia warning signs and symptoms vary from person to person. Some people, especially if they often have low blood glucose levels, only have a few symptoms (known as loss of hypoglycaemia awareness).

You may have symptoms such as:

- Hunger
- Shaky / dizzy / sweaty / pale
- Feeling anxious or irritable
- Looking pale
- Tingling of lips / fingers.

Other people may notice that you are:

- Uncoordinated/clumsy
- Irritable

Reference No.

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Department

Diabetes

Review due

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- Not able to speak
- Having night sweats

Always wear or carry some form of diabetes identification.

How to treat yourself if you have hypo

1. STOP what you are doing
2. Take some fast acting glucose:
 - 6 glucose tablets
 - 5 glucotabs
 - 5 jelly babies
 - 220mls Lucozade® Original
 - 100mls Ribena® full strength
 - 170mls pure orange juice
 - 180mls Lemonade/cola (full sugar)
 - 2 tubes of GlucoGel® - only available on prescription from your GP
3. Check blood glucose level after 10 minutes
4. If blood glucose level is still less than 4mmols/L, repeat Step 2. If the blood glucose level is more than 4mmols/L, then move on to Step 5
5. Follow the fast acting glucose with a snack:
 - Half a sandwich
 - Fruit
 - Cereal
 - Biscuits and milk
 - Next meal (if due).

Hypoglycaemia with loss of consciousness

Very low blood glucose levels can cause you to become unconscious. In that case, you must not be given anything by mouth but you will need an injection of glucagon. If you are not with a person who is trained to give glucagon, the emergency services will need to be called.

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What is glucagon?

Glucagon is a hormone which acts against insulin to raise the blood glucose level. It is available on prescription. Glucagon may take about 15 minutes to take effect. It may also cause you to feel sick. In some cases, a friend or relative can be told how to give you glucagon.

A doctor or ambulance should be called if glucagon does not help.

After the hypo

- Ask yourself why you had the hypo. If there is an obvious cause, try not to let it happen again. If there appears to be no reason, reduce the dose of the relevant insulin so that you do not risk having another hypo the next day.
- After the hypo, your blood glucose level may be very high for several hours due to the action you have taken to raise your blood glucose levels. Also, your body will make anti-insulin hormones in an effort to correct the hypo. Do not worry about this.
- Hypos should only happen very rarely, if at all. If you have repeated hypos you should contact the diabetes team.
- Think about why it happened and make changes accordingly. Your blood glucose level may be high for several hours, this is normal.
- Contact your diabetes team.

Contact information

Diabetes Nurses

Cheltenham General Hospital
Tel: 0300 422 4266 (answerphone)

Gloucestershire Royal Hospital
Tel: 0300 422 8613 (answerphone)

Please leave your name and contact number. Your call will be returned within 48 hours.

Alternatively you can email on ghn-tr.diabetesnurses@nhs.net

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