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Hypoglycaemia or 'hypo' (page 1 of 4)

'Hypo' is short for hypoglycaemia

- hypoglycaemia is the medical term for low blood glucose
- if your blood glucose level falls below 4mmol/L this is a 'hypo'
- maintaining your blood glucose level is a balance between the glucose you take in (from food and drinks) and the glucose you store or use up (by taking insulin or tablets for diabetes, and exercise).

If blood glucose levels drop too low this can cause a 'hypo'.

'Hypos' can have a number of causes:

- not getting the balance right between food and insulin dose
- delayed or missed meals/snacks.
- exercising more than usual, e.g.
 - * spring-cleaning the house
 - * digging the garden
 - * dancing at a party.
- too many tablets for diabetes
- alcohol
- stress
- hot weather.

Symptoms of a 'hypo'

The way you feel when your blood glucose is low varies from person to person and you will soon learn to recognise your own early warning signs and how to take action.

'Hypos' can be divided into three types:

- mild
- moderate
- severe.

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Mild 'hypo'

This is the most common type of 'hypo'. The symptoms may include:

Sweating	Tingling hands, feet, lips or tongue	Palpitations – rapid heart beat
Dizziness	Hunger	Difficulty in concentrating
Trembling	Blurred vision	Headache.

If you have any of these symptoms you should do a blood glucose test to check your exact level.

If your level is not below 4mmol/L, then you are unlikely to be 'hypo'.

If in doubt, take some fast-acting carbohydrate (sugar), such as glucose tablets or a glucose drink anyway.

Treating a mild 'hypo'

Treating a mild 'hypo' is simple.

Step 1

You need to take 15-20g of fast-acting carbohydrate by mouth. That is:

- 5-6 dextrose tablets
- 3 teaspoons of sugar in water
- 200ml Lucozade Energy (not Lucozade 'Alert' or 'Sport' varieties)
- 200ml lemonade or coke (not diet drinks)
- 1 - 2 tubes of Glucogel (10g glucose per tube)
- 3 - 4 large Jelly Babies (e.g. Bassett's) or 5-6 small jelly babies (most other brands)
- 1 small carton fruit juice (200mls).

Retest your blood sugar after 15 minutes. If it is still less than 4 mmols/L, repeat step 1.

Step 2

Provided that your blood glucose is above 4mmols/L, then either eat your next meal early or have a slow-acting carbohydrate snack to help keep your blood glucose level up until the next meal, such as:

- 2 digestive biscuits
- a slice of toast or bread and butter
- a small bowl of cereal
- a cereal bar
- a banana.

Remember – always carry some fast-acting carbohydrate (e.g. glucose tablets) with you just in case you have a hypo.

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Moderate 'hypo'

If you don't treat mild symptoms quickly, your brain will not have enough glucose to work normally. Other people will notice your symptoms but you may not feel ill yourself.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms may include:

- odd behaviour, e.g. rudeness or spontaneous laughter
- you may appear to be drunk when you are not
- bad temper, moodiness or aggressive behaviour
- confusion.

Let your friends, family and colleagues at work read this leaflet so they will recognise this unusual behaviour and be able to help you.

They should not take any notice if you try to refuse their help – you may not recognise your symptoms and be reluctant to take the sugar they offer.

What is the treatment?

Take immediate action.

Have some sugar (liquid form is the easiest) as quickly as possible, such as a sugary drink as above (not the diet version).

Explain to your friends and family that they may have to encourage you to drink it – but only if you are awake and able to swallow.

When you start feeling better:

- eat your next meal early
- have a good snack as above.

If you pass out (become unconscious), your friends or family should follow the instructions on how to treat severe hypoglycaemia.

Severe 'hypo'

Occasionally, you may not spot the warning signs and you may pass out (become unconscious).

What are the symptoms?

- passing out (unconsciousness).

What is the treatment?

Explain to your friends and family that if they find you unconscious they will need to:

- call 999 immediately for an ambulance
- inject you with glucagon if your doctor has prescribed this and provided instructions on how to use it

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- not to give you anything by mouth (as you may choke).

Using Glucagon

What is glucagon?

Glucagon is a hormone produced from the pancreas. Glucagon has the opposite effect to insulin. It works to raise blood glucose. The effect of glucagon only lasts for a short time.

When you are conscious again, you must have sugar or a meal to stop the 'hypo' returning.

How do you use glucagon for treating hypoglycaemia?

If you have access to glucagon, regularly check it is not out of date. When the date of use is nearly up, ask your doctor to prescribe you with a new one.

Friends and family may be nervous about giving you an injection. Let them give you your insulin occasionally, to help them overcome their worries.

Instructions on how to use a glucagon test kit are shown in the product leaflet. Let your friends and family read them so that they are familiar with it.

When you start feeling better:

- When you are conscious, have a drink containing sugar.

To prevent a further 'hypo'

- Continue to have small amounts of sugary drinks until you feel well enough to eat
- Check your blood glucose level – you may need to adjust your insulin dose.

If you have recurring 'hypos', see your doctor or diabetes specialist nurse.

If you have had a severe hypo requiring glucagon and/or you have called the paramedics, you should make an appointment to see your GP or contact your diabetes nurse specialist.