

**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 a 'hypo') is when your blood glucose level is less than 4mmol/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 meals, late meals
- Alcohol
- Hot weather

Sometimes there is 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
- Feeling anxious or irritable
- Looking pale
- Tingling of the lips and fingers
- Feeling shaky/dizzy/sweaty

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Department

Diabetes

Review due

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Other people may notice that you are:

- Uncoordinated/clumsy
- Irritable
- Not able to speak
- Having night sweats

Wear or carry a form of diabetes identification and make sure that other people know what to do if you have a hypo.

How to treat yourself if you have hypo

1. **Stop** what you are doing; you need to act immediately to treat a hypo.
2. Take some fast-acting glucose:
 - 5 to 6 dextrose tablets
 - 4 to 5 glucotabs
 - 3 to 4 jelly babies
 - 170 to 220mls pure orange juice
 - 150 to 190mls Coca Cola[®] (full sugar)
 - 2 tubes of GlucoGel[®] - only on prescription from your GP

Due to the changing sugar content of Lucozade[®] and Ribena[®], we no longer recommend using this as treatment.

3. Check your blood glucose level again after 10 minutes.
4. If your blood glucose level is still less than 4mmol/L, repeat Step 2. If your blood glucose level is more than 4mmol/L, move to Step 5.
5. Follow the fast-acting glucose with a snack:
 - Half a sandwich
 - Fruit
 - Next meal (if due)
 - Biscuits and milk
 - Cereal

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Hypoglycaemia with loss of consciousness

Very low blood glucose levels can cause you to become unconscious. If this happens you must not be given anything by mouth and 999 (Emergency Services) must be called. If you have glucagon prescribed, this is when it should be used. You should be put on your side with your head tilted back (the recovery position).

After the hypo

- Try to think why you had a hypo, was there an obvious cause? If yes, can you make changes to prevent it happening again?
- After the hypo, your blood glucose level may be high for several hours due to the action you have taken to treat your low glucose. 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 you have repeated hypos, you should contact the diabetes team.

Driving and hypos

- Keep glucose treatments in the car at all times.
- Before driving, check your blood glucose, it needs to be more than 5mmol/l and check every 2 hours if you are on a long journey.
- If you have a hypo while driving, stop the car as soon as possible. Remove the keys to demonstrate you are not in charge of the car, move into the passenger seat, if safe to do so, and treat the hypo as per the instructions in this leaflet.
- You need to wait at least 45 minutes after recovery from a hypo before you can drive.

Please visit www.gov.uk/diabetes-driving for more information.

Patient Information

Contact information

Cheltenham General Hospital
Tel: 0300422 4266

Gloucestershire Royal Hospital
Tel: 0300422 8613

Please leave a message with your name, date of birth and contact number. We will aim to return your call within 48 hours.

Alternatively, email ghn-tr.diabetesnurses@nhs.net

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Making a choice

Shared Decision Making

If you are asked to make a choice, you may have lots of questions that you want to ask. You may also want to talk over your options with your family or friends. It can help to write a list of the questions you want answered and take it to your appointment.



Ask 3 Questions

To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions if you are asked to make a choice about your healthcare.

1. What are my options?
2. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?

These resources have been adapted with kind permission from the MAGIC Programme, supported by the Health Foundation

* Ask 3 Questions is based on Shepherd HL, et al. Three questions that patients can ask to improve the quality of information physicians give about treatment options: A cross-over trial. Patient Education and Counselling, 2011;84: 379-85



<https://aqua.nhs.uk/resources/shared-decision-making-case-studies/>