

Help with ‘hypos’

Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio CD, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please contact the PALS desk on 01271 314090 or at ndht.pals@nhs.net.

What is hypoglycaemia?

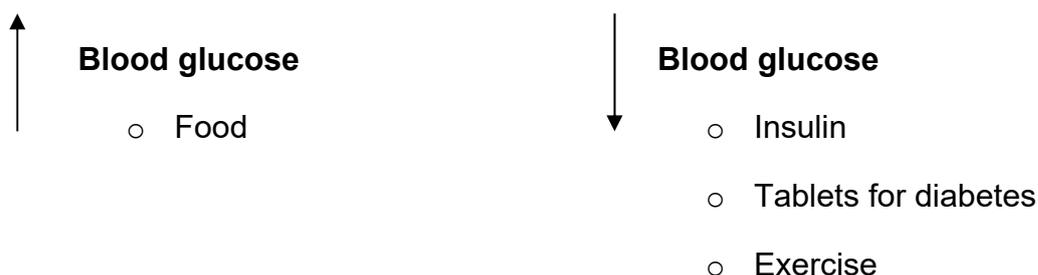
Hypoglycaemia or a ‘hypo’ is when your blood sugar level is less than 4.0mmol/L.

Remember 4 is the floor!

Why do ‘hypos’ occur?

Maintaining your blood glucose level is a balance between:

- The glucose you take in (from food)
- The glucose you use up by exercising
- The glucose lowering effect of insulin or tablets



If blood glucose levels drop too low, this can cause a ‘hypo’.

What can cause a ‘hypo’?

- Eating too little or less carbohydrate than normal
- Delayed or missed meals/snacks

- Exercising more than usual e.g.
 - Spring cleaning the house
 - Digging the garden
 - Dancing at a party
- Too much insulin or some diabetes tablets
- Changes to your medication
- Changes to your injection sites
- Alcohol
- Hot weather
- Weight loss
- Injecting into a muscle instead of the fatty layer under your skin

What do 'hypos' feel like?

The way you feel when your blood glucose is low varies from person to person.

You will soon learn to recognise your own early warning signs and how to take action.

You may feel:

- Sweaty
- Dizzy
- Irritable
- Shaky

'Hypos' can be divided into 3 types:

- Mild
- Moderate
- Severe

Mild hypoglycaemia

This is the most common type of 'hypo'.

Symptoms may include:

- Sweating
- Dizziness

- Shaking
- Tingling hands, feet, lips or tongue
- Hunger
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Pounding heart

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

What is the treatment?

Take:

- 5-6 dextrose tablets
- 4 large jelly babies or 7 large jelly beans
- 200ml of orange juice
- 170 ml of Lucozade fizzy drink
- 150ml Coca Cola
- Check your blood glucose after 10 minutes and if it's still low, repeat the treatment
- Check the sugar content of other sugary drinks due to a recent reduction in the sugar content.

When you start feeling better:

Have a snack (e.g. 2 plain digestive biscuits) or eat your next meal early.

Remember – always carry some form of treatment with you.

Do not use chocolate to treat a 'hypo' as the sugar release can be too slow.

Moderate hypoglycaemia

If you don't treat your mild symptoms quickly, your brain will not have enough glucose to work normally.

Symptoms may include:

- Headache
- Poor concentration
- Poor coordination

- Double vision
- Confusion
- Odd behaviour e.g. rudeness or aggressive behaviour
- Slurred speech – you may appear to be drunk when you are not

Other people will notice your symptoms but you may not feel ill yourself.

Let your friends and family read this booklet so they will recognise this unusual behaviour and be able to help you.

They should be aware that you may not recognise your symptoms and be reluctant to take the treatment they offer.

What is the treatment?

Take immediate action

Have some sugar (liquid form is the easiest) as quickly as possible, e.g.:

- A sugary drink (not the diet version)
- Explain to your friends and family that they may have to help you drink it (but only if you are awake and able to swallow).
- Check your blood glucose after 10 minutes and if it's still low, repeat the treatment.

When you start feeling better:

Have a snack (e.g. 2 plain digestive biscuits) or eat your next meal early.

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

Severe hypoglycaemia

What is the treatment?

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

- **Immediately call for an ambulance**
- Inject you with glucagon if you have been prescribed this and provided with instructions on how to use it
- Not give you anything by mouth (as you may choke)

When you start feeling better:

- When you are conscious, have a sweet drink (not the diet version) to prevent a further 'hypo'

- Continue to have small amounts of sweet drinks until you feel well enough to eat
- Have a substantial snack or eat your next meal early
- Check your blood glucose level more frequently – you may need to adjust your insulin dose

If you have recurring ‘hypos’ – see your doctor or diabetes specialist nurse.

‘Hypos’ and driving

Having a ‘hypo’ whilst driving could be dangerous for yourself and others.

- Check your blood glucose no more than 2 hours before and during a journey. **If this is less than 5.0 mmol/L, then you should not drive**
- Do not drive for more than 2 hours without stopping to test your blood glucose levels and take a snack if it is less than 5.0 mmol/L.
- If your blood glucose is less than 4.0mmol/L you should not drive; treat the hypo and do not drive until 45 minutes after your blood glucose has returned to normal and you feel fully recovered.
- Keep dextrose tablets, a snack, or a sweet drink (not the diet type) in the car at all times

If you have symptoms of a ‘hypo’ whilst driving:

- Pull over as soon as it is safe to do so
- Take the keys out of the ignition
- Move out of the driver’s seat
- Test blood glucose level

If less than 5.0mmol/L have your usual 'hypo' treatment or a substantial snack

- Do not drive until 45 minutes after blood glucose has returned to normal and you feel fully recovered

If you require further information please visit the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) website www.gov.uk/contact-the-dvla

Checklist

A few useful tips to help with ‘hypos’

- ✓ Always carry your usual 'hypo' treatment with you, and in the car
- ✓ Wear a diabetes identification bracelet/necklace, or carry a diabetes emergency card
- ✓ Tell friends, relatives and people at work about ‘hypos’ and how they can help

- ✓ Don't walk or swim long distances alone
- ✓ Do not drive if you feel 'hypo' or your blood glucose is less than 5.0mmol/L
- ✓ Do not miss meals and always take your insulin at the correct time
- ✓ Test your blood glucose regularly
- ✓ Find out what caused your 'hypo' so you can stop the same thing happening again
- ✓ Visit your doctor or nurse regularly to check your diabetes and general health

References

Diabetes UK: www.diabetes.org.uk

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency: www.directgov.uk

Trend UK: www.trend-uk.org

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email ndht.pals@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

Have your say

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at www.careopinion.org.uk.

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust
Raleigh Park, Barnstaple
Devon EX31 4JB
Tel. 01271 322577
www.northdevonhealth.nhs.uk

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Tel: 01271 313970 / email: ndht.contactus@nhs.net