

Information

Hypoglycaemia

September 2003

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Hypoglycaemia, (hypo) is the word used to describe when the blood glucose level goes below 4 mmol/l. Hypos can happen when you take insulin or some of the diabetes tablets. Mostly these are caused by too much insulin, too many tablets or not enough food, (eg a missed meal or following lots of activity). Sometimes there is no clear reason for the hypo happening.

Warning signs

Most people have some warning signs that their blood glucose level is going too low, these include:

- feeling giddy or shaky
- feeling hungry
- headache
- sweating
- going pale
- heart racing
- not being able to think clearly
- bad-tempered – unreasonable behaviour
- blurred vision
- tingling lips.

Treatment

You should treat a hypo as soon as you notice it happening. If you are unsure if what you are feeling is a hypo, then you may test your blood to check the glucose level. It is sometimes difficult to do your blood test if you are hypo.

To take care of the hypo, you must have some sugar that will get into your blood quickly, eg

- a glass of fruit juice – not squash
- a small glass of Lucozade or cola (not diet cola)

The charity for people with diabetes

Diabetes UK is the operating name of the **British Diabetic Association**
Company limited by guarantee Registered office: 10 Parkway, London NW1 7AA
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- three glucose tablets
- five sweets – these should be barley sugars or similar.

It is important that you always have something sugary with you for use in an emergency. It is important that your friends or family know what signs you have when you go hypo, and, how to treat it as you may not be able to think clearly when your blood glucose goes low. Some people are not aware when their glucose level goes too low.

There is a danger that the blood glucose level could drop again so it is important to eat more starchy food, which raises the blood glucose level more slowly. If it is time for a main meal, then you can have that meal, otherwise you should have,

- a sandwich or
- biscuits or
- bowl of cereal or
- piece of fruit.

If a hypo is not treated, you can become unconscious. Your body will eventually release its stores of glucose into the blood and you will recover. If someone finds you unconscious, they should telephone for an ambulance and tell them a person with diabetes is unconscious. They must not put any food or drink in your mouth if you are unconscious as you could choke.

Further information

We have a range of information sheets produced in five main Asian languages and Cantonese available from the Diabetes UK Careline including *Healthy lifestyle, fasting and diabetes*, *How Diabetes UK can help you* and *Diabetic complications*. To order information sheets or would like further information on any aspect of diabetes please telephone

Telephone 020 7424 1030 (translation service is available)

Open Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm.

From January 2004 there will be a new Diabetes UK Careline number available

Telephone 0845 120 2960 (local call rate)