



**Royal Surrey
County Hospital**
NHS Foundation Trust

How to manage Hypoglycaemia

Nutrition & Dietetics Department

Patient information leaflet

Who is this leaflet for?

This leaflet is for anyone at risk of their blood glucose dropping too low due to diabetes, medications or conditions such as reactive hypoglycaemia.

The information in this leaflet tells you about:

- What hypoglycaemia (shortened to hypo) is
- How to identify if you are having a hypo
- Symptoms of a hypo
- Possible causes of a hypo
- How to treat a hypo
- How to reduce the chance of a hypo occurring
- Hints and tips

What is hypoglycaemia?

Hypoglycaemia (shortened to hypo) occurs when your blood glucose (sometimes referred to as blood sugar) level drops below 4mmol/l (millimoles per litre). This means that your brain does not have enough energy to function normally.

How do I know if I am having a hypo?

The best way to be sure is to check your blood glucose level by using a blood glucose metre. Many people have warning signs and symptoms but some do not.

What are the symptoms of a hypo?

The signs and symptoms of a hypo can vary from person to person. Common examples include:

- sweating
- dizziness
- loss of vision
- shakiness
- hunger
- difficulty in concentrating
- bad temper / mood
- headache

What causes a hypo?

There are several potential causes of hypos. These can include:

- Taking too much insulin
- Taking too much of certain diabetes medication (tablets)
- Skipping or delaying a meal
- Unplanned exercise
- Lack of dietary carbohydrate
- Drinking alcohol without eating food
- Drinking excessive alcohol

Sometimes there does not appear to be a reason.

How can I treat a hypo?

Step 1.

Stop what you are doing, sit down and have 15-20g fast acting glucose such as:

	15g	20g	Notes
Lucozade®	190ml	225ml	
Cola	150ml	200ml	
Ribena® (undiluted)	29ml	38ml	
Sugar	3x tsp	4x tsp	
Sugar lumps	4½	6	
Haribo starmix®	23g	30g	
Jelly babies	3	4	
Orange juice	150ml	200ml	
Glucotabs®	4 tabs	5 tabs	1 tab = 4g fast carb
Gluco juice®	60ml bottle	80ml	

Avoid fatty foods and drinks such as chocolate or milk as the sugar contained within them is likely to be slowly absorbed.

15g of fast acting glucose should increase your blood glucose (sugar) by approximately 5mmol/l

Step 2.

After 10-15 minutes recheck your blood glucose level, if it remains below 4 mmol/l, repeat step 1.

Step 3. **

Once your blood glucose is above 4mmol/l have a starch containing early meal or snack (15-20g) such as:

- a sandwich (made from a slice of medium or thick cut bread)
- a piece of fruit (e.g. a small banana, a medium apple or pear, or 2 plums)

- a milky drink (containing 350ml milk)
- a plain biscuit (such as 2-3 ginger nuts, 3-4 malted milk or rich tea, 2 digestives)
- a small bowl of cereal (such as 1 wheat biscuit or 30g flakes)

** If you have an insulin pump you do not need to have a starch containing snack.

What should I do if I need help from another person during a hypo?

If you are feeling drowsy, someone can help you take a sachet of glucose gel, however this should not be used if you become unconscious due to a high risk of choking.

If you become unconscious, someone will need to place you into the recovery position and call an ambulance. Some people who are prescribed insulin are also prescribed a glucagon kit. This injection needs to be given by a family member or friend who has been trained to use it. If you would like further information on this then please discuss it with your diabetes team.

How can I reduce my chances of suffering from a hypo?

- Don't miss a meal.
- Eat enough carbohydrate.
- Eat extra carbohydrate if you are more active than normal.
- Take your tablets and/or insulin injections correctly.
- Don't drink alcohol on an empty stomach or drink too much alcohol.

If your levels are generally low on a regular basis then discuss this with your diabetes team as your insulin and / or tablet dose may need reviewing.

Hints and tips

- Keep hypo treatments with you at all times.
- If you're having night-time hypos, test your glucose levels before you go to bed and during the night, ask your diabetes team about the best times to test.
- Make sure you carry some form of identification, such as an identity card, bracelet or necklace, so that if you ever become unwell and are unable to communicate, people are aware that you have diabetes and can help.

Reference sources

- **Diabetes UK**
www.diabetes.org.uk/guide-to-diabetes/complications/hypo-hypers/
- **NHS Choices**
www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Hypoglycaemia/Pages/Treatment.aspx
- **British National Formulary**
www.medicinescomplete.com/mc/bnf/current/

The information in this leaflet was correct at time of writing. Please note that product changes are not the responsibility of the author.

Contact details

If you have any questions about the information please contact your dietitian at:

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Egerton Road, Guildford, Surrey GU2 7XX

Telephone: 01483 464119
Fax: 01483 464868
Email: rsch.dietitians@nhs.net

PALS and Advocacy contact details

Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

Telephone: 01483 402757
Email: rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net
Opening hours: 9.00am–3.00pm, Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

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