

Rectory Meadow Surgery

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Information for patients with Diabetes on Insulin or Diabetes tablets (not metformin alone)

Why do I sometimes feel shaky, dizzy and sweaty?

What is a “hypo”?

Glucose is a sugar carried in the bloodstream that your body uses for energy. If you have diabetes, your blood glucose levels can be erratic, sometimes becoming very low – this is called hypoglycaemia (or a “hypo”), and can happen when your blood glucose levels drop below 4 mmol/l.

Symptoms

Early signs and symptoms of a hypo include:

- Sweating heavily
- Feeling anxious
- Trembling and shaking
- Tingling of the lips
- Hunger
- Going pale
- Palpitations

Symptoms vary from person to person, but you will feel “different” very quickly. If you miss these early signs, the symptoms may get worse and include:

- Slurring your words
- Behaving oddly
- Being unusually aggressive or tearful
- Having difficulty in concentrating

If you do not treat your hypo at this stage, you may become unconscious.

Who gets a hypo?

If you are injecting insulin or taking diabetes tablets that make your body produce more insulin, then you may be at risk of hypos.

If you are not sure how your diabetes tablets work, discuss this with your local pharmacist or diabetes nurse.

What causes hypos?

A number of situations can cause a hypo:

- Too much insulin or too many diabetes tablets
- Delayed or missed meals
- Eating less starchy foods than usual
- Unplanned or strenuous activity
- Drinking too much alcohol or drinking alcohol without food

Sometimes there is no obvious cause, but treatment should always be carried out immediately, as advised.

How to treat hypos

Always carry glucose with you to treat hypos quickly

If you recognize that you are having a hypo, you should treat it immediately with something that will raise your blood glucose quickly. Suitable treatments are:

- 3-4 GlucoTabs, 3-4 dextrose tablets, or 4 jelly babies, OR
- 100 ml of Lucozade, OR
- 150 ml (a small can) of non-diet fizzy drink, although amounts may vary, OR
- 200 ml (a small carton) of smooth orange juice

If you do not feel better (or your blood glucose level is still less than 4 mmol/l after 5-10 minutes), repeat ONE of these treatments.

When you start to feel better, and if you are not due to eat a meal, eat some starchy food, like a sandwich or banana.

If you are not able to treat your hypo yourself, but you are still conscious and able to swallow, someone can give you glucose gel if you have this available. If you become unconscious, you will need immediate emergency treatment. Someone should dial 999 for an ambulance. You should be put on your side with your head tilted back. Glucose treatments should NOT be put in your mouth.

Driving and hypos

- Keep glucose treatments in the car at all times
- Check your blood glucose before driving
- Do not drive if your blood glucose level is less than 5 mmol/l

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, and move into the passenger seat if safe to do so. Treat the hypo as advised.

You should not drive for at least 45 minutes after recovery because your response rates will be slower.

Remember . . .

- Having a hypo means that your blood glucose level is too low
- Act IMMEDIATELY by eating or drinking something that will raise your blood glucose quickly
- Never ignore the warning signs
- Make sure other people know what to do when you are having a hypo
- Always carry glucose and diabetes identification
- If you have a hypo more than occasionally, you should see your GP or our diabetes nurse