



Hypoglycaemia

Hypoglycaemia is a low blood glucose level. It is also known as a hypo, insulin reaction or low blood glucose. However well you manage your diabetes you are likely to experience some hypos. It is important to learn the symptoms and understand how to treat a hypo in order to prevent your blood glucose levels falling even lower. A hypo occurs when the blood glucose level has dropped too low, usually below 4mmol/L, although some people may have symptoms at a slightly higher level.

Treatments for hypoglycaemia

A mild case of hypoglycemia can be treated through eating or drinking approximately 15 grams of carbohydrate. Quick acting/easily consumed carbohydrates include:

- ½ can regular (not diet) soft drink
- a small bottle of juice
- a junior popper
- 3 teaspoons of sugar or honey
- 5-7 jelly beans

Some people choose to carry glucose tablets for this express purpose. If you use glucose tablets make sure you read the package to get the right dose.

What next?

Depending on the severity of your hypo, your circumstances and what is available to you the following steps are recommended. Eat your next meal if it is due in the next 20 minutes, as you will need some longer acting carbohydrates to keep your BGL from falling again. Otherwise suggested choices are:

- a piece of fruit
- 1 glass of milk or soy milk
- a sandwich
- 2-3 pieces of dried fruit (apricots or figs)
- 1 small tub of low fat yoghurt

If you are not feeling better 10 minutes after your first hypo treatment, recheck your BGL (if possible). If it is not rising, repeat the first step.



DNSW030 Hypoglycaemia 14012015

What are the symptoms?

While symptoms vary from person to person, common feelings are:

- Weakness, trembling or shaking
- Sweating
- Light headedness
- Headache
- Lack of concentration/behaviour change
- Dizziness
- Tearful/crying
- Irritability
- Numbness or tingling around the lips and fingers
- Hunger
- Palpitations

If you feel any of these symptoms, test your blood glucose level and if it is low treat. If you don't have time to test – treat as if it is a hypo.

Other considerations:

- It is important to treat low blood glucose quickly. If not treated, it can progress to loss of coordination, confusion, slurred speech, loss of consciousness and fitting.
- If you are driving and develop signs of a hypo, pull over to the side of the road, stop your car, and treat the hypo. Do not drive until you are fully recovered.

- Always carry hypo treatment with you if you are taking insulin or the mentioned medications.
- If you are doing strenuous exercise eg: sport, you may need extra carbohydrate before and during activity.
- Make sure your family, friends and employer/teachers know what to do if you can't help yourself during a hypo.
- Wear identification that says you have diabetes.
- If you are having frequent hypos (more than a couple a week, or you can't explain why you had a hypo) talk to your doctor or diabetes educator.



Glucagon

Glucagon is a hormone available on prescription. It can be injected in cases of severe hypoglycaemia (where the person cannot swallow or is unconscious or fitting). Glucagon stimulates the release of glucose from the liver and will raise the blood glucose 10 minutes after injection and lasts for about half an hour.

It is recommended that people with diabetes who are using insulin discuss glucagon with their doctor. Those at greatest risk of severe hypoglycaemia are pre-school and school age children, those with frequent episodes of hypoglycaemia and people who have lost the ability to recognise a hypo (hypoglycaemia unawareness).

Glucagon will need to be administered by someone other than the person with diabetes, so family members and/or friends need to be trained in its use. Glucagon

is dispensed as a dry powder in an ampoule together with a pre-filled liquid containing syringe. This needs to be mixed together before giving into the outer, upper arm, the front of middle of the thigh or the buttock. If people are unsure of when and how to administer it, they should see a diabetes educator.

Glucagon should be stored in a cool place and has an expiry date. It is important that rapidly absorbed carbohydrate be given after recovery from a hypo and the usual hypoglycaemia protocol followed to prevent its recurrence.

Medical Identification

Diabetes NSW recommends that all people at risk of hypoglycaemia wear some kind of medical identification. In cases of emergency, medical ID can alert ambulance attendants, police officers and others of the need for early intervention. There are a variety of products available - please call 1300 136 588 for more details.

More information can be found in our [Hypoglycaemia Fact Sheet](#).

