

# help with hypo's



changing diabetes



# Who is this booklet for?

This booklet is for people with diabetes who want to know more about staying in control of their condition and getting on with their lives.

This booklet provides a quick guide to help you recognise when your blood glucose levels are too low and how to take action. Friends and family will also find this booklet useful as they can help you manage your diabetes.

If you have any further questions or concerns about your diabetes or its treatment, your Doctor or Diabetes Specialist Nurse will be happy to help you.

Further booklets covering other areas in the care of diabetes are available from your Doctor or Diabetic Clinic.

# Contents

## Questions

## Answers

<b>What is a 'hypo'?</b>	Page 1
<b>Why do 'hypos' occur?</b>	Page 2
<b>What can cause a 'hypo'?</b>	Page 3
<b>What does a 'hypo' feel like?</b>	Page 4
<b>Mild hypoglycaemia</b>	Page 5
<b>Moderate hypoglycaemia</b>	Page 7
<b>Severe hypoglycaemia</b>	Page 9
<b>Using glucagon</b>	Page 10
<b>Checklist</b>	Page 12

# What is a 'hypo'?

- **'Hypo'** is short for **hypoglycaemia**
- Hypoglycaemia is the medical term **for low blood glucose**
- If your blood glucose level falls below 4mmol/L you are at risk of having a 'hypo'

**Blood glucose and blood sugar are the same thing**

# Why do 'hypos' occur?

- Maintaining your blood glucose level is a balance between the glucose you take in (from food) and the glucose you store or use up (by taking insulin or tablets for diabetes, and exercise)

↑ **Blood glucose**

- Food

↓ **Blood glucose**

- Insulin
- Tablets for diabetes
- Exercise



- If blood glucose levels drop too low this can cause a 'hypo'

# What can cause a 'hypo'?

**'Hypos' can have a number of causes:**

- Eating too little
- 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
- Too many tablets for diabetes
- Alcohol
- Stress or illness
- Hot weather

# What does a 'hypo' 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
- For example, you may feel:
  - Sweaty
  - Dizzy
  - Bad tempered
  - Moody
- 'Hypos' can be divided into three types:
  - Mild
  - Moderate
  - Severe

# Mild hypoglycaemia

This is the most common type of 'hypo'.

## What are the symptoms?

The symptoms may include:

- Sweating
- Dizziness
- Trembling
- Tingling hands, feet, lips or tongue
- Hunger
- Blurred vision
- Difficulty in concentrating
- Palpitations
- Headache

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

If your level is not below 4mmol/L then you are unlikely to be 'hypo'.

If in doubt, take some fast-acting sugar, e.g. glucose tablets, or glucose drink anyway.

## What is the treatment?

Treating a mild 'hypo' is simple.

Take:

- Dextrose tablets
- Sugar lumps
- Teaspoons of sugar
- Another source of sugar, e.g. a sweet drink (not the diet version)
- Your Doctor or Diabetes nurse will advise you on how much to take

When you start feeling better:

- Eat your next meal early
- Have a good snack

**Remember – always carry some form of sugar with you**



# Moderate hypoglycaemia

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

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

## What are the symptoms?

The symptoms may include:

- Odd behaviour, e.g. rudeness or spontaneous laughter
- You may appear to be drunk when you are not
- Bad temper or moodiness
- Aggressive behaviour
- Confusion

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

They should **not** take any notice if you try to refuse their help – you may not recognise your symptoms and be reluctant to take the sugar 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)
- A tablespoon of sugar dissolved in water

Explain to your friends and family that they may have to pour the liquid into your mouth and encourage you to drink it – but only if you are awake (still conscious).

### When you start feeling better:

- Eat your next meal early
- Have a good snack

**If you pass out (become unconscious), your friends or family should follow the instructions on how to treat severe hypoglycaemia**

# Severe hypoglycaemia

Occasionally, you may not spot your warning signs and you may pass out (become unconscious).

## What are the symptoms?

- Passing out (unconsciousness)

## What is the treatment?

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

- **Call 999 immediately for an ambulance**
- Inject you with glucagon if your Doctor has prescribed this and provided instructions on how to use it
- Not to give you anything by mouth (as you may choke)

## What is glucagon?

- Glucagon occurs naturally in all our bodies
- Glucagon has the opposite effect to insulin. It works by raising blood glucose
- The effect of glucagon only lasts for a short time
- When you are conscious again, you must have sugar to stop the 'hypo' returning

# Using glucagon

## How do you use glucagon for treating hypoglycaemia?

If you have access to glucagon, regularly check it is not out of date. When the date of use is nearly up, ask your Doctor to prescribe you with a new one.

Friends and family may be nervous about giving you an injection. Let them give you your insulin occasionally, to help them overcome their worries.

Instructions on how to use a glucagon test kit are shown in the product leaflet. Let your friends and family read them so that they are familiar with it.



### **When you start feeling better:**

- When you are conscious, have a drink containing sugar to prevent a further 'hypo'
- Continue to have small amounts of sugary drinks until you feel well enough to eat
- Check your blood glucose level – you may need to adjust your insulin dose

### **If you have recurring 'hypos' – see your Doctor or Diabetes Specialist Nurse**

# Check list

## A few useful tips to help with 'hypos'.

- ✓ Always carry dextrose tablets or sugar
- ✓ 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
- ✓ Avoid driving if your blood glucose is low
- ✓ If someone tells you that you need glucose, take it and argue later
- ✓ Try not to miss meals
- ✓ Always take your insulin
- ✓ Test your blood glucose regularly
- ✓ Learn what caused your 'hypo' so you can stop the same thing happening again
- ✓ Visit your Doctor regularly to check your diabetes and general health

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For more information on diabetes visit our website  
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in a downloadable format:

[www.changingdiabetes.co.uk](http://www.changingdiabetes.co.uk)

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