



Bristol  
Community  
Health



# Hypoglycaemia

## Diabetes and Nutrition Services



## How to recognise, treat and prevent hypos

Hypoglycaemia, or 'hypo', is the medical term for low blood glucose levels. This is when your blood glucose level drops below 4mmol/l.

Even if you do not feel any symptoms if you have a blood glucose reading of 4mmol/l or below you should treat it as a hypo.

No matter how careful you are there could be times when you may experience hypos and knowing about them will help you feel prepared.

The symptoms associated with low blood glucose levels vary for individuals, but may include:

### Early signs:

- Sweating and shaking
- Trembling
- Hunger and headaches
- Blurred vision
- Tingling lips
- Palpitations

### Later signs:

- Anxiety and irritability
- Forgetfulness and confusion
- Drowsiness
- Odd behaviour
- Speech difficulty
- Lack of coordination
- Unconsciousness

## A hypo can be caused by:

- Too much insulin/too many tablets
- Delayed or missed meal or snack
- Not enough food – especially carbohydrate containing food such as bread, rice, pasta, potatoes etc.
- Unplanned or strenuous activity
- Drinking too much alcohol or alcohol without food
- Sometimes there is no obvious cause

## Who is likely to experience a hypo?

Anyone taking insulin or some types of oral hypoglycaemic medication.

## What can be done to prevent a hypo?

- Eat regular meals including starchy carbohydrates e.g. rice, pasta, potatoes, cereals
- Have an extra snack or reduce your insulin when you do more activity
- Plan ahead, you may need something to eat if a meal is delayed.
- Check blood glucose levels before and after exercise
- If you have had alcohol have a starchy carbohydrate snack before bedtime

## Be prepared: carry something to help treat a hypo at all times

If you feel any of the symptoms mentioned or if you have a blood glucose level of less than 4 mmol/l, you should:

### 1. Take 15-20g of rapidly digested sugar, for example:-

- 1 x Glucojuice 15g
- 150ml non-diet fizzy drink
- 200ml smooth orange juice
- 4 large jelly babies
- 2 tubes of Glucojel
- 4-5 Gluco tablets
- 5-6 dextrose tablets

**Note:** chocolate, biscuits or milk will not bring your blood glucose levels up quickly enough

**Updated March 2017:** Lucozade Energy sugar content has been reduced. If you are used to using it, you will need to increase the amount you take by 2-3 times depending on the flavour.

If you are using continuous glucose monitoring or the Libre system, please check your blood glucose with a meter.

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- 2. Check your blood glucose level again after 10 minutes.** If it remains below 4mmol/l take another 20 grams of rapidly digested sugar (as above) and test again in 10 minutes (repeat until your blood sugar is above 4mmol/l)
- 3. When your blood glucose levels are above 4mmol/l you should have something more substantial to eat**, e.g. a sandwich, cereal with fruit and yoghurt, or your next normal meal. This will prevent your blood glucose levels from dropping again.

**NB:** It is best to check whether your blood glucose levels are actually too low before taking rapidly digested sugar. Some people experience the symptoms described above, along with an increased thirst and the need to pass urine more often, when their blood glucose levels have gone too high.

If you are taking tablets or insulin to treat your diabetes and find you often have blood glucose readings of less than 4mmol/l then you need to contact your GP or Practice Nurse to discuss this with them as soon as possible. Depending on the problem, you may require a change in your medication.