

Hypoglycaemia

What is hypoglycaemia?

Hypoglycaemia is when your blood glucose (sugar) level has dropped too low (below 4 mmol/L).

Hypoglycaemia might also be called low blood glucose levels, low blood sugar or a 'hypo'.

Hypoglycaemia can happen in people who take insulin or diabetes tablets. It is uncommon in people who manage their type 2 diabetes through lifestyle alone.

What can cause hypoglycaemia?

- Delaying or missing a meal or snack.
- Not eating enough carbohydrate foods (such as bread, rice, pasta and potatoes).
- Taking too much insulin or diabetes tablets compared with the amount of carbohydrate eaten.
- Increased exercise.
- Drinking alcohol (especially on an empty stomach).
- Vomiting.

Symptoms of hypoglycaemia

- Feeling irritable, faint, dizzy or sweaty.
- Hunger.
- Weakness, trembling or shaking (including numbness of the lips and fingers).
- Headache, blurry eyes or lack of coordination.

These symptoms can get progressively worse if hypoglycaemia is not treated.

Symptoms of advanced hypoglycaemia include:

- Confusion and inability to follow instructions.
- Loss of consciousness.
- Seizures.

How to treat hypoglycaemia

Step one: have some 'quick acting carbohydrate'.

One of the following is a suitable serve:



A small glass of juice



Six to seven jellybeans



Three teaspoons
of sugar or honey



Half a can or glass
of soft drink

- A glucose tablet or gel equivalent to 15g of carbohydrate is also a suitable serve.
- Never place food or drink into the mouth of an unconscious person.

Step two: wait 10 – 15 minutes and check your blood glucose levels.

- If your blood glucose level is not rising, repeat step one.

Step three: once your blood glucose level is more than 4.0mmol/L, have a meal or snack that includes 'longer acting carbohydrate'.

One of the following is a suitable serve of longer acting carbohydrate:



A tub of yoghurt



A glass of milk



A sandwich



A banana

This general advice was accurate at the time of publication (June 2020).
For more information about nutrition and your individual needs, see your GP
or an Accredited Practising Dietitian.