York and Scarborough Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Diabetes and Hypoglycaemia

Information for patients, relatives and carers

ⓘ For more information, please contact:

Your diabetes team on telephone number 01904 725789
Or email Yhs-tr.diabetesnursespatienttriage@nhs.net

York Hospital

Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE

Telephone: 01904 631313

Scarborough Hospital

Woodlands Drive, Scarborough, YO12 6QL

Telephone: 01723 342274

Contents **Page**

What is hypoglycaemia? 5

What are the symptoms of hypoglycaemia? 5

What are the causes of hypoglycaemia? 5

How do I treat a ‘hypo’? 6

Severe hypoglycaemia 7

Driving Recommendations 8

Alcohol 9

Tips to Remember 10

Tell us what you think of this leaflet 11

Teaching, training and research 11

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) 11

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats 12

What is hypoglycaemia?

Hypoglycaemia is also known as a ‘hypo’ and is low blood glucose (sugar) of less than 4mmol/l.

What are the symptoms of hypoglycaemia?

- Sweating
- Trembling
- Feeling dizzy
- Hungry
- Headache
- Lack of concentration
- Changes in mood
- Anxiety / irritability
- Blurred vision
- Tingling in the hands, feet and lips
- Palpitations

What are the causes of hypoglycaemia?

- Missing a meal or being late with your next meal
- Eating less carbohydrate at your meal than usual
- Taking too much insulin or too many tablets
- Incorrect timing of insulin or tablets
- If you have been more active than normal
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Hot weather

How do I treat a ‘hypo’?

If you feel as though you may have a low blood glucose level or you have checked your blood glucose level and it is less than 4mmol/l, you should treat it immediately.

Step 1 – Treating a low blood glucose

You will need 15 to 20g of fast acting sugar (glucose) to increase your blood glucose level quickly. This may include one of the following choices:

- Three to four Jelly babies
- 150ml (one mini can) of coca cola or half a standard can (330ml) of coca cola
- Five to seven Dextrose (Lucozade) tablets
- Four to five Glucotabs
- One bottle of Glucojuice (available from pharmacies or online)
- One and half to two tubes of Glucogel (available on prescription)

Allow the glucose to work for approximately 10 to 15 minutes and then re-check your blood glucose level. Repeat step one if your blood glucose level has not started to rise in this time.

Step 1 can be repeated up to **three times** if necessary.

If your blood glucose is improving and starting to rise above 4mmol/l, move to step two to maintain your blood glucose level.

Step 2 – Maintaining your blood glucose level

Choose one of the following options to help prevent your blood glucose level from dropping again:

- one portion of fruit
- two plain biscuits
- one slice of bread / toast
- Your next meal if it is due

Severe hypoglycaemia

If your blood glucose level is so low that you become unconscious and require assistance from another person, this is known as severe hypoglycaemia.

In this situation, you must **not** be given anything by mouth.

If you have been prescribed Glucagon and someone close to you can administer it, then Glucagon should be given by injection promptly.

An ambulance should be called immediately.

Driving Recommendations

You should check your glucose less than two hours before the start of the first journey you make then every two hours after driving has started.
Your blood glucose level should be 5 mmol/L or above before driving off.

If your blood glucose level is 4 - 5mmol/l, you should have a slow-acting carbohydrate snack before you set off.

Always carry your glucose meter and blood glucose strips with you even if you use a real time glucose monitoring system or flash glucose monitoring system, and remember to carry hypo treatment with you.

- If hypoglycaemia does occur while driving **stop** the vehicle safely as soon as possible.
- Switch off the engine, remove the keys from the ignition and move from the driver's seat.
- Treat the hypo and do not start driving again until 45 minutes after your finger prick glucose has returned to normal (at least 5mmol/L). It takes up to 45 minutes for the brain to recover fully.

If you use real time or flash glucose monitoring systems to check your glucose levels and the reading is 4 mmol/L or below, you must stop driving and confirm your finger prick glucose test reading. Your finger prick glucose test must be at least 5 mmol/L before returning to driving.

You must tell the DVLA if:

- You have more than one episode of severe hypoglycaemia while awake within the last 12 months.
- You develop impaired awareness of hypoglycaemia (difficulty in recognising the warning symptoms of low blood glucose).
- If you suffer severe hypoglycaemia while driving.

Check that your blood glucose meter is displaying the correct time and date should you need to provide evidence of your blood glucose monitoring in the event of an accident.

If you are experiencing loss of your hypoglycaemia warning signs then seek advice from your diabetes team.

Alcohol

Alcohol can lower your blood glucose level and increase your risk of having a severe hypo, even into the following day.

Tips to Remember

- Always carry some fast-acting glucose and a blood glucose meter with you.

- Explain to family and friends what hypoglycaemia is and how to recognise it and treat it correctly.

- Always carry an identification card with you and details of your current diabetes treatment.

If you are experiencing frequent hypos or you would like any further advice, please contact your diabetes team.

It is possible to purchase a pocket sized hypo wallet that contains fast acting glucose to treat a hypo. This could be carried with you or kept in the car. For more information contact your diabetes team.

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact: Diabetes Centre, York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE, telephone 01904 725789 or email Yhs-tr.diabetesnursespatienttriage@nhs.net.

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email yhs-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

If you would like this information in a different format, including braille or easy read, or translated into a different language, please speak to a member of staff in the ward or department providing your care.

Patient Information Leaflets can be accessed via the Trust's Patient Information Leaflet website: www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit/patient-information-leaflets/

Owner	Tara Kadis, Diabetes Specialist Nurse
Date first issued	November 2011
Review Date	January 2026
Version	5 (issued October 2023)
Approved by	Centre for Diabetes and Endocrinology
Document Reference	PIL833 v5

© 2023 York and Scarborough Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. All Rights reserved.