



**York Teaching Hospital**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Diabetes and Hypoglycaemia

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:

Your diabetes team on telephone number 01904 726510

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Caring with pride



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## 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 one – 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\*
- 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 one can be repeated up to **three times** if necessary.

\* can be purchased from a Pharmacy or online

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

## **Step two – 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

Always check your blood glucose level every time **before** you start to drive. Your blood glucose level should be above 5mmol/l before driving off.

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

If your blood glucose level is less than 4mmol/l, you should treat the hypo and should wait for 45 minutes once your blood glucose level has returned to normal before setting off on your journey. It will take this long for your brain to recover from a hypo and your responses will be slower, even if you are feeling better.

On longer journeys, you should check your blood glucose level every two hours.

**Remember to keep a spare blood glucose meter in your car as well as some hypo treatment (Lucozade or jelly babies for example).**

If you should experience symptoms of hypoglycaemia whilst you are driving, you must stop the car when it is safe to do so. Turn off the engine and **remove the keys from the ignition**. Treat your hypo and remember to wait for 45 minutes before re-starting your journey.

If you are treated with insulin or a sulphonylurea (such as Gliclazide or Glimepiride) and have more than one episode of severe hypoglycaemia in a 12 month period, or a total loss of your symptoms of hypoglycaemia, the DVLA should be informed. It is likely that your driving licence may be revoked, or not issued as a result. This includes any severe hypos that occur during the night as well as during the day.

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, The York Hospital, Wigginton Road,  
York, YO31 8HE, telephone 01904 726510 or email  
diabetesadmingroup@york.nhs.uk.

## **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  
pals@york.nhs.uk.

An answer phone is available out of hours.



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