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# Hypoglycaemia and Diabetes Mellitus



# Diabetes

Diabetes occurs when the body is no longer able to produce enough insulin or when insulin is not working effectively to control the blood glucose (sugar), which then accumulates in the blood stream. There are two main types of diabetes.

## Type 1 Diabetes

The pancreas becomes unable to produce insulin and insulin injections are required for life.

## Type 2 Diabetes

This is due to the combination of these two changes in the body:

- The cells in the body do not respond to insulin as efficiently as they should do (known as insulin resistance).
- Over a period of time, the pancreas is unable to produce enough insulin to overcome the effect of insulin resistance and keep the blood glucose under control.

## Hypoglycaemia

Hypoglycaemia is the medical term for a low blood glucose level, below 4.0 mmol/L. They are often called “hypos”. This level of blood glucose does not provide enough energy for all the body’s activities. This can happen when you are treated with insulin or taking some types of tablets for diabetes (for example gliclazide).

The information in this leaflet is not intended to replace the advice given to you by your doctor or the service looking after you.

**If you are on insulin please only take as directed by your health care professional using the device given to you. Insulin should never be withdrawn from a cartridge or pen using a needle or syringe.**

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## Further Information

We endeavour to provide an excellent service at all times, but should you have any concerns please, in the first instance, raise these with the Matron, Senior Nurse or Manager on duty.

If they cannot resolve your concern, please contact our Patient Experience Team on 01932 723553 or email [asp-tr.patient.advice@nhs.net](mailto:asp-tr.patient.advice@nhs.net). If you remain concerned, the team can also advise upon how to make a formal complaint.

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always have hypo treatments with you just in case. If you feel hypo while driving it is important to take immediate action.

- Pull over and stop as soon as it is safe.
- Take the keys from the ignition or get out of driving seat.
- Treat hypo as above.
  
- You should not drive for 45 minutes after your blood glucose is above 5mmol/L this is DVLA guidance. Support for hypo management can be sought from your diabetes team

### **Useful links for hypos and driving:**

[www.gov.uk/hypoglycaemia-and-driving](http://www.gov.uk/hypoglycaemia-and-driving)

[www.diabetes.co.uk/driving-and-hypoglycaemia.html](http://www.diabetes.co.uk/driving-and-hypoglycaemia.html)

### **Important things to remember**

- Carry hypo treatment with you at all times e.g. jelly babies or glucose tablets.
- Make sure your family and friends know about hypos so they can help you.
- Wearing or carrying medical I.D. can help in an emergency.
- Seek advice from your diabetes nurse or doctor if you are having lots of hypos or you cannot explain why they are happening.

Not all tablets for diabetes can cause hypoglycaemia. Check with your doctor or nurse if you are not sure if the treatment you are taking can cause a hypoglycaemic attack.

### **Warning signs of a mild hypo can include:**

- Feeling hungry
- Shaking or trembling
- Sweaty
- Going pale
- Fast heart rate or palpitation
- Feeling anxious or irritable
- Feeling tired or weak

### **Warning signs of a more severe hypo can include:**

- Difficulty concentrating
- Confusion
- Irrational behaviour
- Slurred speech

### **Common causes for hypos**

- Missing or delaying a meal
- Too much insulin or tablets
- Not eating enough carbohydrate (starchy) food
- Unplanned or more strenuous exercise
- Drinking alcohol without food or drinking too much alcohol
- After dialysis

## Treatment of Hypoglycaemia

It is important to treat any hypo as soon as you get the warning signals. Do not delay but take action promptly to stop the hypo from becoming more severe. If the blood glucose levels become very low it is possible to become unconscious or have a fit.

### 1. Immediate Action

Take 10-20g of quick acting carbohydrates for a quick rise in blood glucose for example:

- 170ml glass of Lucozade or non-diet soft drink
- 3 - 5 glucose tablets
- 5 sweets such as jelly babies
- Glucose gel is available on prescription if you are treated with insulin.

DO NOT take fatty foods to treat a hypo e.g. chocolate, milk or biscuits as the blood glucose will rise more slowly.

### 2. Check your blood glucose after 15 minutes and have further treatment if it is still low.

### 3. Follow on treatment

Eat 10-20g of slow acting carbohydrate (or starchy) food to stop your blood glucose from going low again, for example:

- Half a sandwich
- Slice of toast
- 2 biscuits (digestives are ideal)

- Small bowl of cereal
- If it is meal time eat it straight away

## Hypos at Night

If you are worried that you might be having hypos in the night check your blood glucose at 2-3am as this is the time when they are most likely to happen. If a hypo occurs when you are asleep it may wake you up. If it does not it is unlikely you will come to any harm but you may wake feeling tired, with a headache or feel "hungover". If you are experiencing hypos at night it is important to talk to your diabetes nurse or doctor about them.

## Hypos and losing consciousness

This is quite uncommon but if it does happen the person should not be given anything by mouth. This severe hypoglycaemia can be treated by an injection of Glucagon or intravenous glucose. An ambulance should be called.

- Nil by mouth
- Call an ambulance
- Turn patient onto their side

## Hypos and driving

It is not safe to drive if your blood glucose is below 5mmol/L. You are required to check your blood glucose before driving and