

South Warwickshire



NHS Foundation Trust

Warwickshire Dietetic Service

Hypoglycaemia

This leaflet provides you with guidance on how to deal with having hypoglycaemia ('hypo'). It also includes tips on prevention and a step-by-step guide on how to treat a 'hypo'.

Hypoglycaemia

What is hypoglycaemia?

Hypoglycaemia, or hypo, is the medical term for low blood glucose levels – that is a blood glucose level of less than 4 mmol/L. This is too low to provide enough energy for your body's activities.

Hypos can happen when you are treated with insulin or some diabetes tablets. No matter how much you know about diabetes or how careful you are, if your diabetes is treated with certain medication, you are likely to experience some hypos.

What causes a hypo?

A hypo can be caused by the following:

- too much insulin and/or too many tablets
- delayed or missed meal or snack
- not enough food, especially carbohydrate containing food
- unplanned, intense or strenuous activity
- drinking too much alcohol or alcohol without food
- sometimes there is no obvious cause.

What are the signs of a mild hypo?

Most people have some warning signs when their blood glucose level starts to go low. These include:

- feeling hungry
- trembling or shakiness
- sweating
- anxiety or irritability
- going pale
- fast pulse or palpitations
- tingling of the lips
- blurred vision.

What are the signs of a more severe hypo?

- difficulty in concentrating
- vagueness or confusion
- irrational behaviour
- fitting, loss of consciousness.

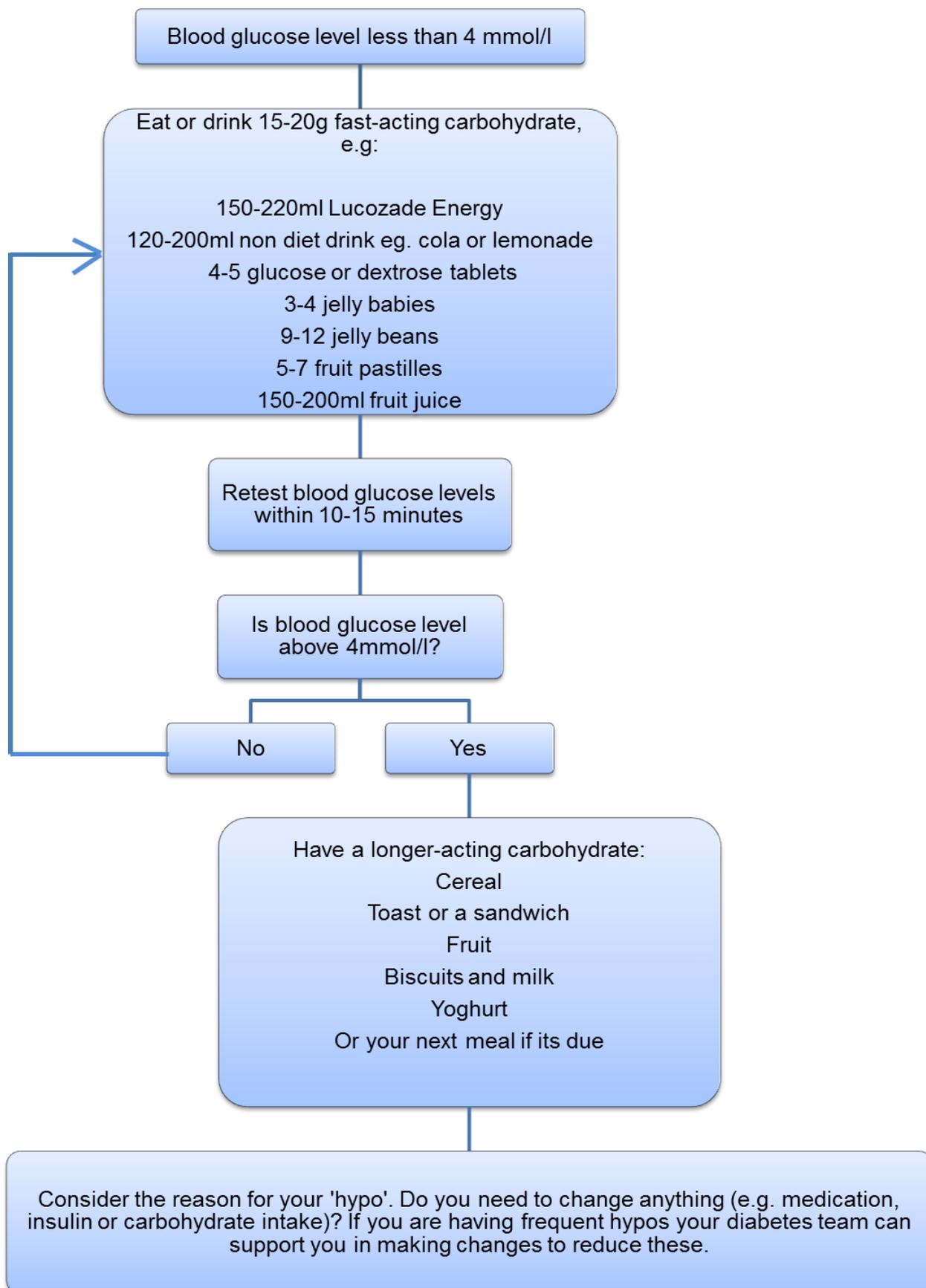
The soft drinks industry levy (also known as the 'sugar tax') changes from April 2018

Soft drinks companies are now being charged for producing soft drinks that are high in added sugar. This has led to many companies changing the sugar content of their products which may affect how much you need to use to treat your hypos. Values provided in this leaflet can act as a guide but always check the label as sugar contents can vary.

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What is the treatment for hypoglycaemia?

If you have symptoms of a hypo take action quickly and treat using the flowchart below as a guide:



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What to do if you are unable to treat your hypo?

If your hypo is more severe and you cannot treat it yourself, someone else can help you.

- By applying GlucoGel (or syrup, jam or honey) on the inside of your cheeks and gently massaging the outside of your cheeks.
- If you are unconscious, Glucagon can be injected if the person you are with has been trained to use it. Otherwise those you are with should call an ambulance immediately.

Important: If you are unable to swallow or are unconscious, you should not be given anything by mouth (including GlucoGel, syrup, jam or honey). Make sure your family and friends are aware of this. If you are unconscious, you should be placed in the recovery position (on your side, with your head tilted back) so that your tongue does not block your throat and therefore your airway.

What if I have a hypo at night?

If you have a hypo while sleeping, it is unlikely that you will come to any harm. The hypo may wake you but, if it does not, you may wake up feeling very tired, with a headache or hangover sensation. If you are concerned about night-time hypos, check your blood glucose between 2.00a.m. and 3.00a.m., when hypos are most likely to happen. Keep something sugary by your bed that can be easily eaten just in case. Alternatively, have a snack before bed-time such as biscuits and milk, half a sandwich, fruit or yoghurt.

What should I do if I want to take part in physical activity?

Physical activity generally lowers your blood glucose level so it is important to eat some form of carbohydrate before, possibly during and after your activity, especially if it is strenuous or lasts a long time. Hypos can happen up to 36 hours after strenuous or prolonged physical activity so you might need to adjust your medication or carbohydrate intake to compensate.

What if I have a hypo whilst driving?

If you are on insulin, it is a legal requirement to test your blood glucose levels before driving and repeat every 2 hours if it is a long journey. Your blood glucose should be 5mmol/L or more to drive. If you feel you may be experiencing a hypo, stop the vehicle as soon as possible, switch off the engine, remove the keys from the ignition and move from the drivers seat. Always keep some hypo treatment in your vehicle and treat your hypo in the usual way. The DVLA advises you to wait at least 45 minutes after your blood glucose level returns to normal before driving again.

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Can alcohol cause a hypo?

Drinking a lot of alcohol or drinking on an empty stomach makes a hypo more likely to occur. The outward signs of a hypo are also very similar to those of being drunk. Always have something to eat if you are drinking alcohol, tell the people you are with about your diabetes and what to do if you need help treating a hypo. Your body breaks down 1 unit of alcohol in an hour, so if you drink 5 units of alcohol, you could still experience a hypo 5 hours later. Some people may require less insulin the day after drinking large amounts of alcohol. Speak to your diabetes team for more information.

Important points to remember.

- Always have something sugary with you for use in an emergency.
- Always wear some medical identification.
- Tell your friends or family what your usual signs are when you are hypo and how to treat it, as you may not be able to think clearly when your blood glucose goes too low.
- You will come to recognise your own hypo warning signs, but these may change over time, so be prepared to check your blood glucose level if you experience any unusual symptoms.

The above information is based on Diabetes UK recommendations. Further advice can be found on their website.

DIABETES UK
KNOW DIABETES. FIGHT DIABETES.

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Equality Statement

At South Warwickshire NHS Foundation Trust we are fully committed to equality and diversity, both as an employer and as a service provider. We have a policy statement in our Equality Strategy that clearly outlines our commitment to equality for service users, patients and staff:

You and your family have the right to be treated fairly and be routinely involved in decisions about your treatment and care. You can expect to be treated with dignity and respect. You will not be discriminated against on any grounds including age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation.

You have a responsibility to treat other service users, patients and our staff with dignity and respect

Our information for patients can also be made available in other languages, Braille, audio tape, disc or in large print.

PALS

We offer a Patient Advice Liaison Service (PALS). This is a confidential service for families to help with any questions or concerns about local health services.

You can contact the service by the direct telephone line on 01926 600 054 by email:

Pals@swft.nhs.uk or by calling in person to the PALS Office which is located in the Lakin Road Entrance to the hospital.

If you have any queries about your diet, please contact us on 01926 600818, selecting option 3.

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