



Hypoglycaemia

Dr Deborah Wake – Diabetes Consultant

Hypoglycaemia, sometimes called a hypo, is defined as having a blood glucose level of less than 4mmol/l. Some people will get hypo symptoms when their blood glucose levels are a bit higher than this, particularly if they have been running with high blood sugar levels for some time. Hypoglycaemia can only occur in people who are taking insulin or certain kinds of tablets called sulphonylureas. So, these are tablets with names like Gliclazide, Glimpiride or Glipizide.

Lil Lintern – Type 1 Patient

When I was diagnosed with my diabetes, I had no idea what hypos were. Okay, it's when my blood sugars are going to go low because I think before my diagnosis they run high for such a long time and I hadn't realized. There was no awareness at all. As soon as they started coming down, up to about 10, I would start to shake, my lips would tingle, my tongue would feel funny, I'd get the sweats. Now that I'm kind of a long time now that it's much better. My hypo awareness is amazing. It's much better. By the time I get to 3.8, I'm already getting the shakes. So, I've got good hypo awareness.

Chris Batchelor – Type 1 Patient

I find my concentration goes, I get it sort of feeling of anxiety. I can tell when they're down to about 3.5. Below that, yes, I get other symptoms. It's at night, I used to have problems. If I had a hypo at night and my wife would wake me up and say, you're sweating.

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The common symptoms that people report with hypos are tremor, shakiness, a feeling like their heart is racing, a feeling of hunger. Some people describe a change in their vision. Some people describe some tingling in their fingers or in their lips. The symptoms are actually quite individual and different people report quite different things.

If a hypo is not treated when these early symptoms occur, then further symptoms can come thereafter that and that includes things like confusion, aggression and drowsiness and rarely a serious hypo can actually cause somebody to black out or collapse and even cause an epileptic seizure to occur. Now, fortunately this is extremely rare and most people get very good warning symptoms when the blood sugar levels are going low and they are able to pick this up and correct it very quickly.



Kay Johnson – Type 1 Patient

If I'm rushing about, I get a good warning - 4.5, 5. If I'm sat down, I can go down as low as two, but as soon as I get up, oh! And how do I treat it? Jelly babies, normally jelly babies or the little sugar sweets. And I always wake up in the night. I woke up this morning, actually - 2.7. A few jelly babies.

Rizwana Ali – Type 1 Patient

When my sugar level goes to 4, then I know that something is wrong and I do test it because I'm on, it's, it's again a very good thing that I'm on freestyle Libre. I just quickly test it and I know what to do.

I feel very sweaty and I'm very, not dizzy, but very, I'm not comfortable. I'm not that person and I start to sweat, so automatically I know, cause I've had it for so long. I'll know that something is wrong.

Sue Batchelor – Type 1 Patient

And the difficult thing I've found being diabetic is often you're eating when you don't want to because you're forever trying to get your blood sugar up, which is really irritating, it sort of leads you.

Regarding hypos, I've had a few bad hypos. Fortunately I've never had to be hospitalized for a hypo or had any other help apart from my husband who's had to pour Lucozade down my throat. He's a cyclist. He came back once from a bike ride and I was digging in the garden and I had a bad hyper and fell into a large hole in the garden, which he had to fish me out of.

I get warning, not the warnings I used to get, I don't get sweaty. Usually the first thing I get is loss of concentration, feeling of doom and just knowing that it's wrong and then I just check it then.

Sharon Blatcher - Type 1 Patient

My experience of hypos is actually got a lot less than it was. That's thanks to my Libre and my pump that I'm currently using but I do find that I have quite early notification that my sugars aren't where they need to be. I feel sweaty. I forget feeling a bit anxious so it gets me to check. Literally I do a swipe with my phone on my Libre scanner to see where it's saying I am. If it's close to hypo situation, I then back it up with a check with my pump. I do recover from a hypo by using just 3 jelly babies, brilliant it is, and I actually get a treat at the same time. So, there is a positive in that situation, but obviously you'd rather not be having the hypos at all.



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So, how to treat a hypo. Well, if you think you are having a hypo, then check your blood glucose level and if you are then treat it with about 15 to 20grams of fast-acting carbohydrate. So, that might be something like 4 to 5 jelly babies, about 200ml of concentrated fruit juice, maybe 4 to 6 glucose tablets. Chocolate or other foods with a high fat content are not a good hypo treatment, so avoid those.

You should remember that your blood glucose level needs to be rechecked after about 10 minutes and if it's still not above 4 then you should repeat the treatment.

Once your blood glucose level is above 4 then you should follow up with about 20grams of medium acting carbohydrate. So, that's something like bread or a biscuit or if you are about to have your next meal, then just go ahead and have that.

If you are not able to treat your hypo yourself, or if you have become drowsy, then other people might need to help you and it's, therefore, really important that you tell your friends and family about hypos and explain to them so they know what to do.

If you become confused, your family or your friends might be able to help you take your hypo treatment by mouth.

If you become unconscious and you can't swallow then your family should phone the emergency services. If you have a glucagon pen, this is sometimes called a glucagen, and a member of your friends or family know how to use it, then they can give you an injection while they are waiting for the emergency services to arrive. Once you are conscious, you should have some fast acting and then medium acting carbohydrate as we discussed before.

It's really unusual to black out due to a hypo and so if you are newly diagnosed then please don't worry too much about this but it is important for you and your family to know what to do and you should carry hypo treatments with you at all times.

