Do you have Diabetes?

Do you sometimes feel shaky, dizzy and sweaty?

You could be experiencing a hypo

- What is a “hypo”?
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What is a “hypo”? 

A hypo is when your blood glucose drops below 4 mmol/L. Glucose is a sugar carried in the bloodstream that your body uses for energy. If you have diabetes, your blood glucose levels can be erratic, sometimes becoming very low – this is called hypoglycaemia (or a “hypo”). It is not your diabetes causing this but it may be caused by your diabetes medicine.

Who is at risk? 

You are at risk of hypos if you are injecting insulin or taking diabetes tablets that make your body produce more insulin. If you are not sure about your diabetes medicine, fill in the tear-off strip and discuss this with your doctor or nurse.

Symptoms you may experience 

Early signs and symptoms of a hypo include:

- Sweating heavily
- Feeling anxious
- Trembling and shaking
- Tingling of the lips
- Hunger
- Looking pale
- Palpitations
- Dizziness
- Blurred vision

Symptoms vary from person to person. If you miss these early signs, the symptoms may get worse:

- Slurring your words
- Behaving oddly
- Being unusually aggressive or tearful
- Having difficulty in concentrating

If you do not treat your hypo at this stage, you may become unconscious.
What causes hypos?

If you are taking diabetes medicines, the following can put you at risk of a hypo:

- Delayed or missed meals
- Eating less starchy foods
- Unplanned or strenuous activity
- Drinking too much alcohol or drinking alcohol without food

Sometimes there is no obvious cause. Treatment should be carried out immediately, as advised by your doctor or nurse.

How to treat hypos

If you recognise that you are having a hypo, treat it immediately with something to raise your blood glucose quickly such as:

- 100 mL of Lucozade™, OR
- 150 mL (a small can) of non-diet fizzy drink, although amounts may vary, OR
- 200 mL (a small carton) of smooth orange juice, OR
- 4–5 GlucoTabs®, 5–6 dextrose tablets, or 4 large jelly babies

If you do not feel better (or your blood glucose level is still less than 4 mmol/L after 5–10 minutes), repeat ONE of the above.

When you start to feel better, eat some starchy food, like a sandwich or banana.

If you are not able to treat your hypo yourself, but you are still conscious and able to swallow, administer glucose gel.

If you become unconscious, you will need immediate emergency treatment. Someone should DIAL 999 for an ambulance.

You should be put on your side with your head tilted back. Glucose treatments should NOT be put in your mouth.
Patient hypoglycaemia symptom checker

Please fill in the symptom checker so that your doctor or nurse can assess if you are experiencing hypos and help you to prevent any further episodes.

Symptom checker:

Please tick the box if you have experienced any of the following symptoms in the last month:

- Feeling shaky
- Palpitations
- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Feeling anxious
- Sudden difficulty in concentrating
- Going pale
- Behaving oddly
- Sudden sweating
- Slurring of words
- Sudden headache
- Mood swings
- Blurred vision

These symptoms are associated with mild to severe episodes of hypoglycaemia

If you have ticked yes to any of the above symptoms you may have had a hypo or be at risk of having future hypos. To help avoid future hypos you should discuss managing your diabetes with your doctor or nurse.
About you...

How long have you had the symptoms?

Tell us about your hypo experience. e.g. what were you doing when the symptoms occurred?
How to avoid hypos

- Eat regularly
- Eat more carbohydrate before and after physical activity
- Keep to sensible alcohol limits and do not drink on an empty stomach
- Take your medication as prescribed
- Test your blood glucose levels if your readings are regularly dropping and discuss this with your doctor or nurse, or adjust your insulin

Always carry glucose with you to quickly treat a hypo.

Driving and hypos

- Keep glucose treatments in the car at all times
- Check your blood glucose before driving
- Do not drive if your blood glucose level is less than 5 mmol/L

If you have a hypo whilst driving, stop the car as soon as possible. Remove the keys to demonstrate you are not in charge of the car, and move into the passenger seat if safe to do so. Treat the hypo as advised.

You should not drive for at least 45 minutes after recovery because your response rates will be slower.

The DVLA has guidance in place for reporting episodes of hypoglycaemia. It is important you notify them in line with this guidance.

The latest Medical Standards of Fitness to Drive can be found on the DVLA website: https://www.gov.uk/diabetes-driving

Further information

- Diabetes UK careline: 0845 120 2960
- Diabetes UK: www.diabetes.org.uk
- Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency: www.direct.gov.uk

If you are concerned about anything within this leaflet please discuss this with your doctor or nurse.

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