

What is hypoglycaemia ('hypo')?

Hypoglycaemia is the medical term used to describe the situation where blood glucose levels become too low, usually referred to as a 'hypo'. Hypoglycaemia (low blood sugar) is the opposite to hyperglycaemia (high blood sugar).

Your brain needs adequate and constant glucose to work properly. If the level of glucose gets dangerously low (less than 4mmol/L) there is a chance you can lose consciousness or worse.

What usually causes a low blood glucose level?

- Not eating enough food, or not eating enough carbohydrate with your meal.
- Skipping or delaying a meal, or missing snacks if they are a part of your food plan.
- Taking too much insulin or diabetes medication.
- Introducing an exercise routine without making adjustments to your medication doses.
- Losing weight without regularly consulting your doctor to review your medication.
- Drinking alcohol in excess or without taking carbohydrate food at the same time.

While hypoglycaemia can sometimes be experienced by people taking certain tablets for their diabetes, it is more common in people who inject insulin.

How will I feel when my blood glucose is low?

You may feel some or all of the following symptoms of a 'hypo':

- shaky
- sweaty
- feeling unwell
- heart palpitations
- tingling around the mouth and tongue
- hunger
- double vision or blurriness
- confusion.

On the other hand, you may feel none of these symptoms at all, and for those people who tend not to experience any symptoms, it is wise to test your sugar levels regularly. Low blood glucose levels can happen even when you're working really hard to actively manage your diabetes.

It is important to treat a 'hypo' urgently to stop your blood glucose level from dropping too low.

As with any weight loss program, those on medication should be monitoring their blood sugars more frequently throughout the *Healthy Weight For Life*[™] program. Dosage adjustments may be needed to prevent 'hypos'.

Before commencing it is important that you and your doctor have already discussed a plan for how best to manage your medication whilst on the program.

Call our team on 1800 226 180 with any queries or concerns.



Avoiding and treating 'hypos'

Long term 'hypo' prevention

- Be aware of what causes low sugar levels for you and avoid or prepare for these situations.
- Test and record your levels regularly and discuss them with your healthcare professional.
- Review your medications with your doctor if your blood sugar is persistently low.
- Take your medications as directed.

It is important to remember that if you are regularly experiencing low blood sugar levels during the course of your weight loss program, you should speak to your doctor about reducing the dosage of your diabetes medications, rather than having to increase your sugar intake to bring your levels back up, as this will only slow your weight loss.



Treating 'hypos' in the short term

If your blood glucose is low, you need glucose immediately. People who use insulin or take diabetes tablets are advised to:

- Carry some glucose or simple sugar at all times, such as jelly beans or fruit juice.
- Keep a blood glucose testing meter handy to check blood glucose regularly.

If you experience any of the symptoms of a 'hypo' or are feeling unwell in anyway and you don't have your meter handy, it is safest to assume you are experiencing low blood glucose and treat accordingly:

- Immediately have some quick acting simple sugars such as lollies or fruit juice.
- After five minutes have some complex carbohydrates such as a sandwich, a banana, or three plain biscuits.
- After 15 - 20 minutes, or as soon as practically possible, check your blood glucose.
- When you are feeling better again, make a plan to talk to your doctor about reviewing your medications.



Self management

Blood Glucose Monitoring

The treatment guidelines for Diabetes Management in General Practice advocate regular blood glucose monitoring for anyone with diabetes. How often you test your blood is something that should be decided between you and your medical team depending on the level of control required. The frequency of monitoring should be increased during times when your normal routine is disrupted such as whilst travelling, during holidays or special celebrations, throughout illness, during periods of weight loss and when changing medications.

As you progress through the *Healthy Weight For Life*[™] Program you may experience substantial reductions in your blood glucose as a result of weight and waist loss. It is important to test your blood sugar levels more frequently so you and your healthcare team can better manage your medications .

Precautions during exercise

Being active is very beneficial for people with diabetes as it improves metabolic control and reduces cardiovascular risk. A combination of moderate aerobic exercise and resistance training (working against weights) helps to increase sensitivity to insulin, assists weight loss, improves blood pressure and cholesterol and promotes feelings of well-being.

However, those who take medications or use insulin should be aware that blood glucose levels can respond variably to exercise. Early signs of hypoglycaemia are sweating, feeling faint and weakness which may be overlooked during exercise.

The following precautions should be taken when doing anything active:

- Do not exercise if you are sick with flu, infection or any other illness.
- Visit your doctor regularly to review your medications.
- Monitor your blood sugar levels before and after exercise.
- Carry some quick acting sugar with you at all times.

Alcohol

Alcoholic drinks can potentially destabilise blood glucose levels, so moderation is very important. For specific advice on your alcohol consumption it is best to discuss your individual circumstances with your doctor. Additional background information on diabetes and alcohol can be found on the Diabetes Australia website. If you do choose to drink alcohol, try to eat a small amount of complex carbohydrate foods at the same time, such as low fat crackers or wholegrain bread to prevent blood glucose levels dropping too low.

Other precautions

If you are on medication, such as insulin, it is a good idea to carry some form of medical identification, or wear a medic-alert bracelet or necklace, that clearly states you have diabetes. This will be helpful if you need assistance and are unable to communicate during a 'hypo'.

Please note: *The information contained in these information sheet is general in nature and does not replace the advice of your healthcare professional. Speak to your doctor or pharmacist if new symptoms develop or if you have any concerns.*