

# **HYPOGLYCEMIA**

## **Low blood sugar**

If you have diabetes hopefully someone has talked to you about Hypoglycemia (low blood sugar). Hypoglycemia is a complication of diabetes that can come on quite suddenly. The key is to be prepared. In order to be prepared, you would need to know more than just what it is and what to do for it. The focus today, more than ever before, is on prevention. Here at the Diabetes Education Center of Long Beach Medical Center we address hypoglycemia education on an individual basis and also in our group program. Let's take a closer look at hypoglycemia.

### **What is Hypoglycemia?**

Hypoglycemia is a condition of low blood sugar. According to the American Diabetes Association, and for most people hypoglycemia is usually a blood sugar below 70mg/dl. However this can also be individual. For example we may consider a blood sugar of 90mg/dl low for a baby or someone that is elderly.

### **Who is at risk?**

Most people think that only those people taking insulin for their diabetes are at risk for hypoglycemia. Not true. People taking some of the oral medications for diabetes are at the same risk as those people taking insulin. You will need to check with your doctor or call me at the Diabetes Education Center 897-4354 to find out if the medication you are on can cause hypoglycemia.

### **What are the signs and symptoms?**

When blood sugar gets too low you may feel: (Remember a person does not need to feel all of these or feel any of these to have hypoglycemia.)

- shaky
- sweaty
- tired
- hungry
- a fast heartbeat
- crabby or confused
- have blurred vision or headache

### **What should you do?**

The most important thing to remember is that hypoglycemia is a life threatening condition that can not wait. It must take priority over anything else you may be doing at the time. Unfortunately, hypoglycemia, left untreated may result in a seizure and severe injury. If you feel any of the above signs and symptoms or if you suspect you are low, check your blood sugar immediately to confirm that you are indeed low. If you do not have your blood glucose meter with you and you are feeling any of the signs and symptoms will need to treat yourself. It is always better to be *safe than sorry*. Listed below are examples of the appropriate treatment options for hypoglycemia.

All are equivalent to 15 grams of carbohydrate. Which is the usual treatment for a low blood sugar reaction. 15 grams of a carbohydrate can come in the form of :

- three glucose tablets (some brands require 4 tablets, check the label)
- 4 ounces of juice ( 1/2 cup)
- 4 ounces of soda (1/2 cup, of regular soda NOT DIET)
- one tube of glucose gel
- 6-7 hard candies (not sugar free)

Taking one of the above is only the beginning. Next you should wait 15 minutes then check your blood sugar again. Record the number in your logbook. Also, be sure to write down that you had a low blood sugar reaction.

If after 15 minutes your blood sugar is not over 80mg/dl or if you don't have your meter and can't check, but do not feel better, you will need to repeat the treatment.

Wait 15 minutes again and when your blood sugar is finally above 80mg/dl you should have a snack. This snack can be any form of carbohydrate and should be about 15 grams. If it happens to be time for a meal, (ex. lunch or dinner) just eat as planned, there is no need for a snack.

### **What causes Hypoglycemia?**

The most common causes of hypoglycemia are:

- getting more exercise than usual, or exercise without preparation.
- taking too much diabetes medication (pills or insulin).
- skipping meals or eating at the wrong time for the medication that you take.
- not finishing meals or snacks
- drinking alcoholic beverages

### **How can you prevent Hypoglycemia?**

Low blood sugar can be prevented if you:

- eat your meals on time
- don't skip meals or snacks
- check your blood sugar on schedule and do extra tests when you feel different from normal
- learn to adjust your food and diabetes medicine when you exercise.

Hypoglycemia is preventable and usually easy to treat. If you would like to learn more about hypoglycemia or if you have had an unpleasant low blood sugar experienced in the past, call the Diabetes Education Center today. We can help you learn about **your** diabetes and prevent this from happening again.

Until next month...

Lucille Hughes RN, CDE

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