

Fear of hypos (hypoglycaemia)

Hypoglycaemia or a hypo is when your blood glucose level (also called blood sugar) is too low. It's a common challenge for people managing their diabetes with insulin or other glucose lowering medications. People with diabetes often worry or become fearful about hypos.

If you feel this way, you are not alone. There are many things you can do to prevent hypos and ease your fears.

“There’s nothing worse than having that fear at the back of your head that you’re going to be in a meeting or something and pass out from not treating a hypo quick enough – it’s never happened, touch wood.”

Melissa, 31, person with diabetes



What is fear of hypos?

Fear of hypos is a specific and intense feeling brought on by the risk or experiences of having low blood sugar.

It is common to worry about:

- losing consciousness in public
- having an accident or injury
- having a hypo while asleep
- being embarrassed or attracting unwanted attention
- needing or relying on others for help
- losing independence or the ability to drive
- being judged in a negative way by others.

It's natural to have concerns about hypos. This keeps you alert to the symptoms of low blood sugar, which means you can treat a hypo promptly when it happens. But fear of hypos becomes a serious problem when these worries start to impact on daily life or how you manage your diabetes, for example:

- reducing insulin or over-eating to avoid having a hypo
- checking blood sugar levels excessively
- avoiding social activities for fear of embarrassment
- avoiding being alone due to worries about safety.

If you think you're experiencing fear of hypos, talk with your healthcare professional. They will assess the problem and help you work out ways to prevent hypos and reduce your fears.

What you can do

Whether or not you fear hypos, it's important to look after your emotional wellbeing.

Here are some ideas of things you could try. These work for some people, but not everyone – and that's okay.

Be informed

Hypos can be prevented. The first step is to be informed about your actual risk and how to prevent, recognise and treat hypos. If you get the right information and support, you'll find that you feel more confident to manage your risk of hypos, treat them before they become severe and reduce your fears.

A good place to start is our website at www.diabetes.org.uk/hypo We have lots of information to help you understand how to manage hypos.

Have a hypo plan

Having a plan for how to manage a hypo can help reduce any anxiety or fears you may have about the experience. Keep your hypo treatments with you at all times so you can treat a hypo quickly (see box below).

Make sure your family, friends and other people that you spend a lot of time with know what to do when you can't treat a hypo yourself. If you live alone, consider asking a friend or neighbour to check on you on a regular basis.

How to manage a hypo

If you have hypo symptoms (like shaking, sweating or light-headedness or a blood sugar level of less than 4mmol/l (even if you don't have symptoms), here's how to manage it:

1. Have 15 to 20g of a fast-acting carb, like 200ml fruit juice or five jelly babies.
2. Wait 15 minutes and then re-check your blood sugar level.
3. If it's still less than 4mmol/l, have another 15 to 20g of a fast-acting carb (see point 1.)
4. Think about having a slower-acting carb, like a sandwich, if your next meal is more than 20 minutes away.

Get all the info you need to manage hypos at www.diabetes.org.uk/hypo

Ask questions

It's okay if you don't have all the answers about hypos or managing your fear of hypos. Some people find that writing a list of questions and concerns is a useful way of processing some of their feelings.

Bring this list along to your next diabetes appointment, so you don't forget the questions or concerns you want to talk over with your healthcare professional.

Remember there are no silly questions or concerns – they're all valid. Your healthcare professional will appreciate anything you mention, as it will help them offer you the best support.

Be aware of your symptoms

People who are less aware of their hypo symptoms often fear hypos the most. This is because they don't know when their hypos are coming on. This leaves them feeling out of control.

- Keep a record of your symptoms throughout the day, like how you were feeling physically and emotionally and how you reacted.
- After a hypo, ask yourself, 'What do I think caused this hypo?' – what were you doing at the time, when did you last eat or inject insulin? No one knows your body better than you so trust your own judgement.
- Notice patterns in the days and times you have hypos and think about how you can avoid similar hypos in the future.
- Ask yourself, 'What concerns me the most about having a hypo?'. You may not be fully aware of what you're fearing. Thinking it through and writing it down can give you a lot of insight.

Getting to know your hypo symptoms better can prepare you to take action to prevent low blood

sugars. This can make you feel more in control and less fearful of the unknown. Your healthcare team can also help you develop a plan to reduce your hypos and fears.

If you don't have symptoms (or don't recognise them quickly enough to avoid a hypo), speak with your healthcare professional. You may have hypo unawareness, which they can help with.

We've got more information about hypo unawareness at www.diabetes.org.uk/hypo-unawareness

"I understand so much more about it now and I know how to get myself out of a hypo and I know how to adjust if I'm too high with my sugars, mainly because I've done the DAFNE programme, I think."

Dave, 62, person with type 1 diabetes

Get connected

Talking things through with others can be a big help. You might like to talk with your family or friends about how you feel, and how they can support you.

It may also help to talk with others who understand what it is like to live with diabetes. It can be reassuring to know that other people face similar challenges and to share ideas about how to cope with them. From our support groups to our online forum, [we can help](#) you get connected.

Ask your healthcare professional for our leaflet on peer support, or contact us for more information.

Talk with a professional

The ideas may help you know how to prevent hypos and reduce your fears. But they can't replace professional help. It's always a good idea to talk about your concerns with your healthcare team.

Who can help?

Your diabetes healthcare professionals

Your diabetes health professionals are there to help you with all aspects of your diabetes, including how you feel about hypos. If you feel comfortable, share your feelings with them – they will give you non-judgmental support and advice. You may want to talk with your:

- general practitioner (GP)
- diabetologist (consultant)
- diabetes specialist nurse
- practice nurse
- dietitian.

Bring this leaflet along to your consultation to help get the conversation started. You will probably feel relieved after sharing your feelings, and it will help your health professional to understand how you're feeling.

Together, you can make plans to reduce your fears. For example, your healthcare professional can help you to safely make some small changes to your diabetes management so that it feels less scary.

Ask them for information about local structured diabetes education. Learning more about hypos and how to best manage your diabetes could make it easier to prevent and treat hypos. It will strengthen your confidence in your skills and reduce your concerns.

Psychological specialists

You might also like to talk with a psychological specialist. They will help you find ways to cope with your fear of hypos.

You can find help from your local Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) team. Ask your diabetes team to refer you, or contact them directly by searching online for 'IAPT' and your local area name.

More information and support

There are lots of different sources of information and support. Talk with your healthcare professional team about which ones might be right for you.

Diabetes self-management education courses (offered locally as part of diabetes care)

Group programmes to give information about living well with diabetes, also giving the chance to meet and share experiences with others with diabetes. Ask your healthcare team to refer you.

X-PERT (Type 2)

Website: www.xperthealth.org.uk

DESMOND (Type 2)

Website: www.desmond-project.org.uk

DAFNE: (Type 1)

Website: www.dafne.uk.com

How we help

Diabetes UK

We're fighting for a world where diabetes can do no harm. And as the UK's leading diabetes charity, it's our job to tackle the diabetes crisis. We provide information, advice and support to people with all types of diabetes so they can learn to live well with their condition. And we bring people together so they can learn from each other and get to grips with diabetes. Visit our website www.diabetes.org.uk/hypo

Our helpline is managed by trained counsellors there to listen, give support and answer questions. Call **0345 123 2399**

You can meet other people with diabetes at one of our local support groups.

Visit www.diabetes.org.uk/support-groups

Or chat to others online in our support forum at www.diabetes.org.uk/forum

And if you're on social media, join our online community on Facebook or follow us at **@DiabetesUK** on Twitter.