

DEALING WITH HYPOS

WHAT A NON-DIABETIC PERSON NEEDS TO KNOW

- 1** A hypo (full official name hypoglycaemia) is when a person (in this case with diabetes) has a low level of glucose in their blood. This can affect their ability to function 'normally' and it is a potentially serious and possibly fatal condition.
- 2** Some of those with diabetes will have awareness if their blood sugar is low or falling, whilst others may not. Even those with awareness may not always know.
- 3** The reasons for a hypo are not always evident but are usually related to food or physical exertion and the interactivity of these with each other and the need for insulin (in type 1s).
- 4** Symptoms of a person being hypo can include the following: sweating; shaking or trembling; being dizzy or confused; hunger; nausea; feeling weak, lethargic or sleepy; impaired vision; slurred speech; and coordination.
- 5** Behaviour and emotions can be adversely affected when a person is hypo. It would include the following, where the person appears to be acting out of the ordinary: appearing drunk; aggressive; arguing, being irritable, sad or tearful and inappropriate social behaviours. The person may resist help offered or treatment.
- 6** Treatment for a hypo, if mild, is usually a small amount of fast acting sugar eg. sugary snack or drink. The quicker the sugar is consumed the likelihood that the person will recover quicker and be back to 'normal' without further intervention.
- 7** An emergency situation may arise if the person doesn't treat the hypo quickly, or if the person is not aware of the low blood sugar level. They may be unresponsive or fall into unconsciousness. In these circumstances an emergency shot of glucagon can help or it may be necessary to call an ambulance.
- 8** Use of a glucose sensor can alert a person to low levels of blood sugar and enable them to take evasive action. Some sensors now offer alarms to give warnings when blood sugar levels are dropping and/or too low.
- 9** Recovery is not immediate, even when symptoms subside, and can take anywhere from a few minutes to over a day. Some people with diabetes will need their own space to recover.
- 10** Driving and operating machinery should not be undertaken immediately after a person has been hypo as the brain will need time to recover. Exercise or activities involving intensive physical exertion are also best avoided for the 24 hours immediately after a person has a hypo.
- 11** A person with diabetes may also suffer from hypo anxiety - a fear of not being able to control their symptoms when going low.

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