

Healthy Eating for Reactive Hypoglycaemia

This dietary advice sheet gives some general information to help you make the recommended changes to your diet. If you need more detailed advice, or if you are following a special diet that makes it difficult to make these changes, please ask your doctor to refer you to a registered dietitian.

The term 'Reactive hypoglycaemia' is used to describe episodes of low blood glucose levels which typically occur 2 – 4 hours after a meal. It is thought that this is triggered by the over-production of insulin following a meal with a high carbohydrate content.

Insulin is a hormone produced by the pancreas. It transports glucose from the blood to the tissues to produce energy. If too much insulin is produced after a high carbohydrate meal, blood glucose levels can drop too low.

Common symptoms

- Fatigue
- Dizziness or light-headedness
- Sweating
- Irritability or anxiety
- Increased appetite or cravings for sweet foods
- Trembling
- Difficulty concentrating
- Nausea and vomiting
- Blurred vision
- Rapid heart beat

The following dietary changes may help relieve these symptoms:

Ensure a healthy, balanced diet

Include a variety of foods in your diet and aim for 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day. Eat small amounts of healthy fats such as olive oil, nuts and seeds.

Eat five to six small meals or snacks a day

Eat approximately every 3 hours to avoid long gaps between meals.

Avoid big portions of starchy foods

For example: potatoes, pasta, cereal and rice. Spread them throughout the day by having small amounts at each meal.

Have protein foods at each meal and snack

Good sources of protein include meat and poultry, fish, eggs, beans and lentils, tofu, nuts and dairy foods.

Choose more high fibre low glycaemic foods.

Add lentils, beans or pulses to meals. Use wholegrains such as granary bread and brown rice. Have more fruit (not fruit juice) and vegetables. Increase your fluid intake when increasing your fibre intake. See overleaf for more information on the glycaemic index.

Limit foods high in sugar

For example: sweets, sweet desserts, jam or honey. Small amounts can be taken occasionally as part of a meal.

Avoid sugary drinks

For example: sugary ("non-diet") fizzy drinks, fruit juice or squash. Use no-added sugar squash or diet drinks and dilute fruit juice with water.

Alcohol advice

Alcohol can lower blood glucose levels. If wished, 1-2 units of alcohol may be taken with, or shortly after, meals. Use diet soft drinks or mixers as above.

Avoid caffeine if it makes your symptoms worse

Avoid energy drinks, cola and chocolate. Try decaffeinated tea or coffee and use sweetener in place of sugar.

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Low/Medium GI foods

These are carbohydrate-containing foods which are digested more slowly and can therefore help to keep blood glucose levels steady.

Bread:

Multi-grain
Granary
Rye
Wheat Tortillas

Cereal:

Special K (not flavoured)
Porridge (not Instant)
All Bran

Dairy

All milk
Natural yoghurt

Fruit:

Apples
Apricots
Banana (not very ripe)
Cherries
Grapefruit
Kiwi fruit
Mango
Oranges
Peaches
Pears
Plums
Strawberries

Potato:

Sweet potato
Boiled new potatoes

Rice/pasta:

All pasta
Brown rice, Basmati rice, white long grain rice
Couscous

Vegetables:

All vegetables
Peas, beans and lentils
Avoid re-heating baked beans

You may find keeping a food and symptom diary is useful to identify triggers for your symptoms.

Meal suggestions

Breakfast

Porridge with nuts and berries or
Poached egg on wholegrain bread or
All Bran or
Grilled bacon and tomatoes on granary toast

Lunch

Soups with beans, peas or lentils or
Sandwiches made with multigrain bread and lean meat. or
Chicken salad wrap or
Omelette with a slice of granary bread

Evening meal

Chilli with brown rice or
Grilled fish with plenty of vegetables and new potatoes or
Salmon and noodles with stir-fry vegetables or
Chicken casserole with new potatoes

Snacks

1 portion of fruit
1 small pot of yoghurt
Slices of apple and cheese
Vegetable sticks and hummus
2 whole wheat crackers with peanut butter
1 slice granary toast with low fat spread and cheese or ham or peanut butter
A handful of nuts
A handful of cherry tomatoes

What should you do if you have a hypoglycaemic episode?

Eat or drink something that will provide a small amount of fast acting carbohydrates such as:

- 3-4 jelly babies
- a small can of cola
- 200ml of fruit juice from concentrate
- 5 dextrose tablets

Follow this up with a slow acting carbohydrate such as:

- a slice of granary bread
- 1 digestive
- a piece of fruit
- 200ml of milk,