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

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,

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