

Diabetes: Conversion to Insulin: Dietary Advice

This dietary advice sheet gives some general information to help you make the recommended changes to your diet. We recommend that you are also referred to a registered dietitian to discuss these dietary changes in more detail.

What is Insulin?

- Insulin is a hormone, which is produced in the body and takes glucose (sugar) from blood into muscles and other tissues. This keeps blood glucose at the right levels.
- You need to take insulin because your own does not work effectively.

When taking insulin the principles of the diet remain the same:

- Do not miss meals.
- Eat regular meals and include a starchy food, such as bread, potato, pasta, rice or breakfast cereal at each meal to avoid low blood sugars known as “hypos” (see opposite).
- Limit sugar or sugary foods.
- Eat plenty of fruit and vegetables.
 - All fruit contains natural sugar so spread your intake across the day.
- Eat less fat and fatty foods.

You may also need a bedtime snack, depending on your blood glucose levels. Your diabetes nurse or doctor can advise you on this.

- If you make significant changes to your diet, you may change your blood glucose levels and your insulin may need to be adjusted.

Weight Control

- Taking insulin may lead to weight gain.
- It is much easier to control your diabetes if you are not overweight.
- You can help to control your weight and blood glucose by:



- Eating a healthy diet
- Being as active as possible
- Avoiding snacking between meals, unless this is needed to prevent hypos
- Limiting portion sizes

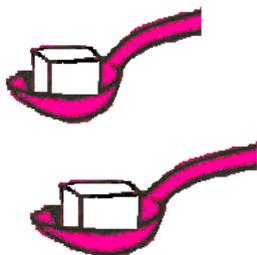
When your blood glucose falls too low:

- You can experience something called a ‘hypo’ when your blood glucose falls below 4mmol/l.
- This can be caused by:
 - not eating enough starchy carbohydrate food at meals
 - delaying or missing meals
 - being more active than usual
 - drinking too much alcohol
 - injecting too much insulin
- The most common symptoms of a hypo are shaking, sweating, blurred vision, light-headedness, confusion and irritability.

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To treat a hypo:

1. First, to raise your blood glucose quick take **15-20g** fast acting carbohydrate such as:
 - 5-7 dextrose tablets
 - **or** 5 fruit pastilles
 - **or** 3-4 jelly babies
 - **or** 5 Glucotabs
 - **or** 1-2 Glucogel tubes
 - **or** 170mls original Lucozade
 - **or** 150-200mls orange juice
 - **or** 150-200mls full sugar cola
 - **or** 3-4 teaspoons of sugar
2. Repeat blood test after 15minutes and repeat until blood glucose (sugar) levels are above 4mmols/l or 6mmol/l, depending on your individual target level (if you are testing your blood glucose at home).
3. Then, take **15-20g** slow acting starchy carbohydrate to keep your blood glucose above your target level e.g.
 - Your next meal if it is due
 - **or** 1 digestive biscuits (10g)
 - **or** 2 Rich Tea/Cream crackers (10g)
 - **or** 1 slice of toast (15-20g)
 - **or** a portion of fruit (10g)
 - **or** 200ml milk (10g)



Always be ready to treat a hypo by carrying glucose tablets

Make sure family and friends know how to recognise signs of a hypo as they can help you treat it.



Illness

- Illness can result in your blood glucose being high. **You must continue your insulin even if you are not eating.**
- Eating little and often can be very useful if your appetite is smaller than usual. Continue to regularly have carbohydrate containing foods.
- **Consult your doctor or diabetes specialist nurse if problems continue for longer than 48 hours or you are concerned.**

Alcohol

- Alcohol can lower your blood glucose level and lead to a hypo. The symptoms of a hypo are similar to being drunk, so it is important to have a starchy food during or after drinking.

Activity

- Being more active than usual can lower your blood glucose and result in a hypo.
- You may therefore have to eat additional starchy foods with your meals or as a snack before and after the activity. Have potatoes, **or** rice, **or** pasta, **or** bread, **or** breakfast cereals.
- You may also need to eat a sugary snack or have a sugary drink during any prolonged or strenuous activity, such as an hour's walk or jogging.
- Useful products include:
 - a chocolate biscuit
 - **or** 3 – 4 jelly babies
 - **or** an oat based sweet cereal bar
 - **or** plain biscuit
 - **or** fruit
 - **or** glucose tablets
 - **or** Lucozade
 - **or** fruit juice
 - **or** fizzy sugary drinks