

Diabetes self-management information series for primary care

HYPOS

Hypoglycaemia management

What is a hypo?

Hypoglycaemia (also known as a hypo) occurs when your blood glucose levels (BGLs) drop too low. Usually, a hypo is less than **4.0 mmol/L**.

For some people, for example the frail or elderly, a hypo may be less than **5.0** or **6.0 mmol/L**.

A hypo is a serious complication if not treated immediately.

Why am I at risk of hypo?

You are at risk of hypo if you are taking a sulphonylurea (see Medications) or insulin.

What are the signs and symptoms of hypo?

Signs and symptoms can be very different for each person.

You may experience one or more of the following during a hypo:

- trembling or shaking
- tingling
- fast heartbeat (palpitations)
- sweating
- nausea
- hunger
- difficulty concentrating
- feeling irritable
- drowsiness or weakness
- dizziness
- headache
- difficulty speaking

What are the common causes of hypo?

- Too much insulin or diabetes medicine
- Not enough carbohydrate in meal or snack
- Extra (more than usual) activity or exercise
- Alcohol
- Missed meal or fasting

Reduced hypo awareness

You may not always feel early warning signs and symptoms of a hypo. And over time you may feel them even less.

If your awareness of hypos reduces, you will need to monitor your BGLs very closely and regularly in order to be safe.

Driving

Do not drive a vehicle if your BGL is less than **5.0 mmol/L**.



Check your BGL before you drive.

5.0mmol/L

Always take hypo treatment and your glucose meter with you in the vehicle.








The only sure way to know if you are experiencing a hypo is to do a BGL check.

If you are feeling hypo symptoms and can't check your BGL, treat the hypo regardless.






Hypo management plan

Make sure people around you – such as family, friends, work colleagues – know how to recognise and treat a hypo.

1 Treat with 15 grams of fast-acting carbohydrate (glucose)

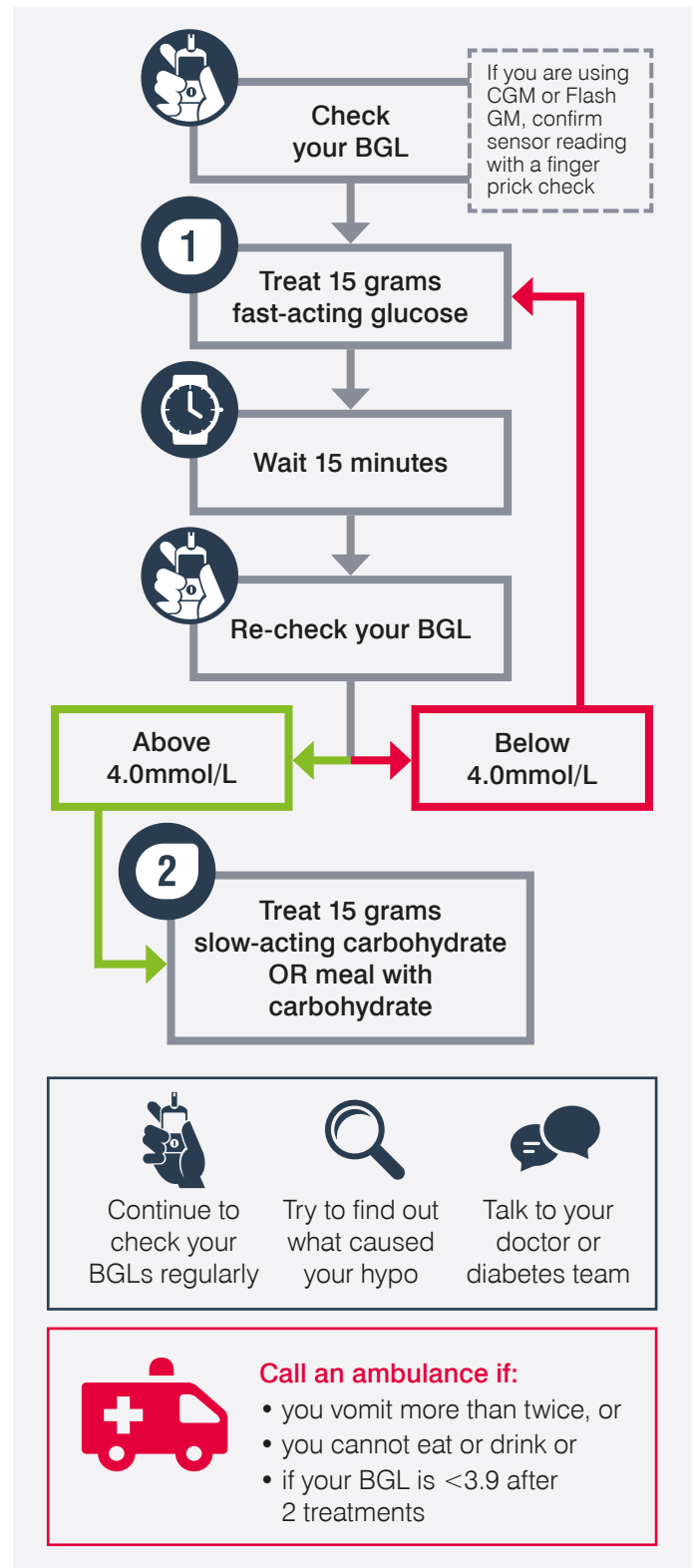
Fast-acting carbohydrates		15 grams
GlucoJel™ Jellybeans (from pharmacy)		5 jellybeans
Regular soft drink (not diet)		150mL
Lucozade®		100mL
Oral glucose gel		1 tube
Glucose tablets		See product guide

2 Follow up with 15 grams of slow-acting carbohydrate snack

Slow-acting carbohydrates		15 grams
Fresh fruit		1 medium piece (apple, banana)
Bread or toast		1 slice
Milk		300mL
Muesli bar		1 bar
A meal that includes at least a quarter plate of carbohydrate		Pasta, rice, potato, couscous, sweet potato, bread, corn



Do not give food or fluid to an unconscious person.



Glucagon

Glucagon is a medication used to treat severe hypoglycaemia. A severe hypo is when you need someone else to treat your hypo – this is often because you are too drowsy or it is unsafe to put anything into your mouth.

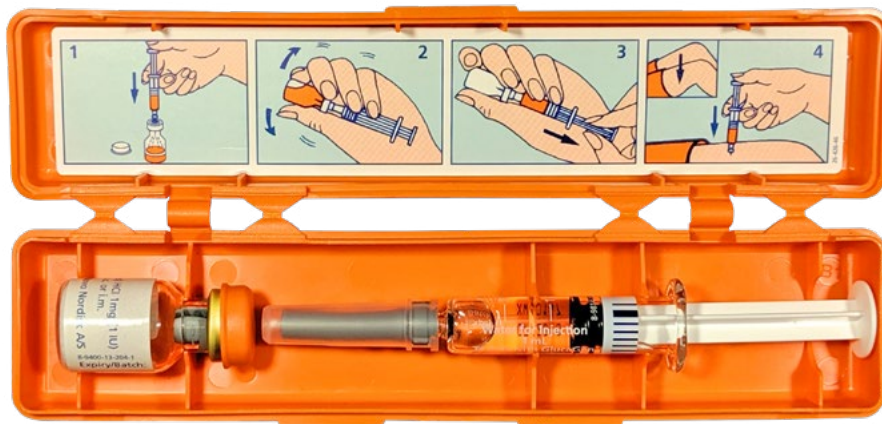
Glucagon is injected into muscle (usually your thigh). It works by releasing glucose stored in your liver which raises your blood glucose levels quickly.

Who needs glucagon?

A doctor will prescribe glucagon to you if you are taking insulin and are at risk of severe hypo. Make sure your glucagon is in date.

Important points about glucagon

- You cannot give glucagon yourself. A relative, friend or colleague must be trained to inject glucagon. Make an appointment with a diabetes educator to arrange glucagon education.
- Glucagon may not work if you have been fasting or drinking alcohol.
- Always follow up by eating slow-acting carbohydrate.
- Contact your doctor as soon as possible after you have used glucagon.
- Do not drive after using glucagon.



Further resources

NDSS (National Diabetes Services Scheme)

Contact the NDSS on **1800 637 700** to order printed copies, or visit ndss.com.au/about-diabetes/resources

- [Managing hypoglycaemia](#)
- [Diabetes and driving booklet](#)

Next steps

- Monitoring blood glucose
- Insulin – Parts 1 & 2
- Hyperglycaemia & sick day management

Need help?

Phone **6215 9000**

or visit diabetestas.org.au