

FACT SHEET

HYPOGLYCEMIA (LOW BLOOD SUGAR) AND GOOD NUTRITION

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Hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) has been a popular diagnosis in recent years. It is not a disease, however, but a symptom. Hypoglycemia indicates a disturbance in glucose metabolism in which glucose has been removed from the blood faster than it can be replenished, resulting in low blood sugar. Many organic and functional states can result in low blood sugar.

Organic Hypoglycemia

Hypoglycemia may be caused by the over production of insulin by the pancreas because of physical abnormalities such as pancreatic tumors, cirrhosis (a disease of the liver) or a deficiency of the adrenal gland. The symptoms of organic hypoglycemia often occur before breakfast or if a meal is skipped. Symptoms of serious organic hypoglycemia include mental confusion, depression, loss of consciousness and coma. Diet changes alone may not be much help if hypoglycemia is organically caused.

Functional Hypoglycemia

Some 70 percent of low blood sugar problems are functional or reactive in nature. Symptoms include extreme hunger, nervousness, difficulty in concentration and headaches. These symptoms begin about 1½ to 2 hours following consumption of a meal rich in starch or sugar. As sugars are absorbed, a rapid rise in the blood glucose triggers the release of insulin, which in turn causes a rapid drop in the blood sugar. Stress seems to aggravate this condition. An accurate diagnosis of the condition can only be made by one's doctor.

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Treatment of Hypoglycemia

Treatment varies according to the causes of the symptoms. Organic problems such as pancreatic tumor require medical or surgical treatment. Functional problems such as depression, anxiety or stress require psychological counseling and/or drug therapy. When eating too much sugar or caffeine or eating at erratic times is the cause, then treatment of hypoglycemia may be by diet.

Frequent Meals

To treat hypoglycemia, three regular meals a day with three snacks between meals are recommended. This insures a constant release of glucose into the blood stream. It is very important to eat a snack containing a meat group food before going to bed because of the long period between the evening meal and breakfast. Nutritious snacks will not cause excessive weight gain if the portions are small and lower calorie foods from each food group are selected. It is of utmost importance to maintain your ideal weight.

Food Selection

Special dietetic foods need not be purchased. Most foods eaten by the family can also be eaten by the person with hypoglycemia. Foods to be avoided include those with concentrated sugars (pie, cookies, candy, doughnuts, jam, jelly, marmalade, sugar-coated cereal, syrup, honey and soda), and beverages containing alcohol or caffeine.

Read food labels carefully for clues on the sugar content of processed foods. If the words sucrose, glucose, dextrose, lactose, fructose or syrups appear first, then there is a large amount of sugar in the product.

Select fresh fruits and vegetables, canned products without sugar, or canned, lightly sweetened

fruits, drained and rinsed in cold water to remove the syrup. Avoid dried fruits and frozen fruits or vegetables with sauces or added sugar. Avoid breaded cutlets, meats containing cereal fillers or creamed meat dishes because these are high in carbohydrates.

Food Preparation

Cook foods without adding fat or sugar. Meats should be baked, roasted or broiled. Foods for the person with low blood sugar may be prepared along with food for the entire family. Remove the portion, however, before adding extra flour, fat, sugar, sauces or gravies.

Flavor foods with fat free bouillon cubes, lemon juice, tomato juice, vinegar or sugar substitutes. Herbs or spices such as mint, garlic, dry mustard, parsley, oregano, pepper and sweet basil also can be used. Other foods allowed are fresh, unsweetened cranberries and rhubarb, and unflavored gelatin.

Recipes designed for use by diabetics can also be used by a person with hypoglycemia. Any recipes without added sugar, fat, flour or pastas could be used. Write the local or district chapter of the Diabetes Association to obtain a copy of their recipe booklet, or contact your local county Extension agent-home economics to help you secure the address.

On the Go

When you are planning to be away from home, take along appropriate snack foods. Recommended snacks might include a cheese wedge, one slice of luncheon meat, two tablespoons of peanut butter, a piece of fresh fruit, a small can of unsweetened juice,

water-packed canned fruits, lettuce, parsley, radishes, celery, an individual box of dry cereal (not sugar-coated), crackers, pretzels, popcorn, half a bagel or a tortilla.

When dining out, select foods wisely so that you can stay within the limitations of your diet. Select only baked or broiled meats without breading or stuffing. Avoid creamy salad dressings. If you can have a starch, select a baked potato, but use only a small amount of butter.

A positive attitude about your diet and careful meal planning are helpful. Learn to select foods wisely according to the special diet given to you by your doctor.

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