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Dealing with Hypoglycaemia (Low Blood Sugar)

This leaflet is created from first aid advice provided by St John Ambulance, the nation's leading first aid charity. This advice is no substitute for first aid training - [find a training course near you](#).

Too much **insulin** can cause low blood sugar or hypoglycaemia (hypo).

This often happens when someone with diabetes misses a meal or does too much exercise. It can also happen after someone has had an epileptic seizure or has been binge drinking.

If someone knows they are diabetic, they may recognise the start of a hypo attack, but without help they may quickly become weak and unresponsive.

What to look for

- Weakness, faintness or hunger.
- Confusion and irrational behaviour.
- Sweating with cold, clammy skin.
- Rapid pulse.
- Trembling.
- Deteriorating level of response.
- Medical warning bracelet or necklace and glucose gel or sweets.
- Medication such as an insulin pen or tablets and a glucose testing kit.

What you need to do

- Help them sit down. If they have their own glucose gel, help them take it. If not, you need to give them something sugary like fruit juice, a fizzy drink, two teaspoons of sugar, or sugary sweets.
- If they improve quickly, give them more sugary food or drink and let them rest. If they have their glucose testing kit with them, help them use it to check their glucose level. Stay with them until they feel completely better.
- If they do not improve quickly, look for any other causes and then call 999 or 112 for medical help.
- While waiting, keep checking their responsiveness, breathing and pulse.

If you're unsure whether their blood sugar is high or low

If you're not sure whether someone has high or low blood sugar, give them something sugary anyway, as this will quickly relieve low blood sugar and is unlikely to do harm in cases of high blood sugar.

If they don't improve quickly, call 999 or 112 for medical help.

If they lose responsiveness at any point, open their airway, check their breathing and prepare to treat someone who's become unresponsive.

Note: these hints are no substitute for thorough knowledge of first aid. St John Ambulance holds [first aid courses](#) throughout the country.

Adapted from the St John Ambulance leaflet: [diabetic emergency](#). Copyright for this leaflet is with St John Ambulance.

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