



Nutrition for Reactive Hypoglycemia

Resource: McKinley Health Center - University of Illinois

www.mckinley.illinois.edu

WHAT IS REACTIVE HYPOGLYCEMIA?

Reactive hypoglycemia can occur when blood glucose falls, stores of glucose from the liver are exhausted and an individual chooses not to eat. The body gradually adjusts to this situation by using muscle protein to feed glucose to brain cells and fat to fuel the other body cells, but before this adjustment takes place, an individual may experience symptoms of glucose deprivation to the brain. Symptoms such as: anxiety, hunger, dizziness, confusion, sleepiness, weakness, shaking muscles and racing heart may result. Most of these symptoms diminish five to ten minutes after eating a source of carbohydrate. Because these symptoms are common to many conditions, a health care provider should be consulted to assess an individual's specific symptoms and concerns.

WHO IS AFFECTED BY REACTIVE HYPOGLYCEMIA?

Reactive hypoglycemia occurs in about 2-3 out of every 10 young women - more often in obese women and less often in people over age 45. While most people experience low blood glucose levels at times, if the symptoms are severe or ongoing it is important to learn to eat a balanced meal or snack promptly.

HOW CAN I CONTROL REACTIVE HYPOGLYCEMIA?

Reactive hypoglycemia can be managed with:

- ▶ Nutritionally balanced meals
- ▶ Frequent meals and snacks
- ▶ Regular exercise
- ▶ Smoking cessation
- ▶ Weight management
- ▶ Medical supervision, if indicated
- ▶ Regular blood sugar checks, if advised

HOW CAN REACTIVE HYPOGLYCEMIA BE CONTROLLED WITH NUTRITIONALLY BALANCED MEALS?

When blood glucose falls, eating carbohydrate foods can bring blood glucose levels back up; a meal or a snack must be eaten. Some people believe the obvious solution is to eat a candy bar or drink a cola beverage. Such a meal or snack is very high in carbohydrate, and consists mostly of simple sugar. It may cause your blood level to rise quickly and then fall quickly. Some people then experience the symptoms of rebound hypoglycemia.

A more helpful choice is to eat food with complex carbohydrates (higher fiber whole grain crackers, bagels, breads or cereal). Complex carbohydrate foods deliver glucose over a longer period of time, eliciting less of a rise and fall in blood glucose. A cracker or other grain food with cheese or another protein/fat is the best choice. The protein/fat slows down the digestion of the carbohydrate and keeps blood sugar more stable.

Some snack and meal suggestions that meet the goal of including a complex carbohydrate, a protein source or a fat include:

- ▶ Meat or cheese sandwich on whole wheat bread
- ▶ Yogurt and fruit
- ▶ Cottage cheese and whole grain crackers
- ▶ Turkey, cheese slices and veggies on a salad
- ▶ Salad with beans or nuts added
- ▶ Peanut butter and whole grain crackers
- ▶ Cheese and whole grain crackers
- ▶ Bean soup and whole grain crackers or bread
- ▶ Cheese on baked potato with skin
- ▶ Whole grain bagel and cream cheese

NUTRITIONAL TIPS TO MANAGE HYPOGLYCEMIA

- ▶ Eat a small meal or snack about every 2-3 hours. Skipping meals can make symptoms worse.
- ▶ Choose high fiber foods at each meal and snack. Fiber helps stabilize blood sugar. Increase fluid intake when you increase fiber intake.
- ▶ Eat a source of protein and/or a source of fat with carbohydrate at each meal or snack. Protein and fat eaten with carbohydrates will help slow glucose release and absorption.
- ▶ Limit simple sugars. (candy, soda, fruit juice, sweets) Simple sugar intake can make hypoglycemia symptoms worse. Moderate your intake.
- ▶ Limit alcohol and caffeine (coffee, tea, soda, chocolate).
- ▶ Eat a meal or snack 1-3 hours before exercise. Extra carbohydrates may be needed before exercise to compensate for energy used.

EATING SUGGESTIONS for REACTIVE HYPOGLYCEMIA

General Guidelines:

- ▶ Eat at least 3 meals and 3 snacks daily
- ▶ Include solid protein with all meals and snacks (meat, fish, poultry, eggs, nuts and nut butters, dried beans, dried peas, lentils, tofu, cheese, cottage cheese, light yogurt).
- ▶ Avoid concentrated sweets
- ▶ Avoid caffeine and alcohol
- ▶ Include high fiber foods in your meal plan daily (whole grain breads & cereals, dried beans, dried peas & lentils).
- ▶ Drink a minimum of 8 cups of water daily (64 oz total)
- ▶ The best time to exercise is after a meal or after a high carbohydrate snack
- ▶ DO NOT SKIP MEALS

INCLUDE THESE FOODS FOR HEALTHY EATING

MILK GROUP FOODS

2-4-servings day

1/2% or skim milk

Fat-free or lowfat cheese

Light yogurt

String cheese (mozzarella)

Fat-free or lowfat cottage cheese

Ice Cream & Frozen yogurt - *limit to 1/2 cup serving and eat with a meal, not as a snack*

MEAT GROUP FOODS

2-3-servings day

Meat

Fish

Poultry

Eggs

Nuts & nut butters

Dried beans - *kidney, pinto, navy, black, refried, etc.*

Dried peas - split and black-eyed

Lentils

Tofu

GRAIN GROUP FOODS

6-11-servings day

Bread - *preferably whole grain*

Cereals - *not sugar-sweetened*

Rice

Pasta - *try whole wheat for more fiber*

Pretzels

Popcorn - *light microwave or air-popped*

Bagels

Pancakes & waffles - *with peanut butter, fresh fruit or whipped topping, no syrup*

Tortillas

Crackers - *all types*

VEGETABLE GROUP FOODS

3-5-servings day

All vegetables

Limit potatoes, peas and corn to 1/2 cup with a meal

INCLUDE THESE FOODS FOR HEALTHY EATING *-continued*

FRUIT GROUP FOODS

2-4-servings day

Any kind of fresh fruit

Canned fruit - drain the juice and eat the whole fruit - *if fruit is packed in heavy or light syrup, drain the syrup and rinse the fruit*

Limit fruit juices to 1/2 cup per day - *only with a meal*

Frozen fruits - *no sugar added*

DESSERT IDEAS

Sugar-free pudding

Sugar-free gelatin

Smoothies:

Blend 1 cup light yogurt with 1/2 to 1 cup frozen unsweetened fruit

BEVERAGE IDEAS

Skim, 1/2% or 1% milk

Diet, caffeine-free sodas

Water

Flavored water - zero calories

Sugar-free - zero calories - fruit flavored beverages

Crystal light

V-8 juice

Tomato juice

Diet V-8 splash

Iced tea - decaf

FOODS TO AVOID:

Cookies

Cakes

Candy

Pies

Donuts

Regular soft drinks

Jam & Jelly

Syrup

Honey

Marshmallows

Regular pudding

Mayonnaise

Butter

Margarine

Potato chips

Sports drinks

Sweetened drinks

Desserts & Sweets made with sugar alcohols, sorbitol, mannitol, xylitol, lactose

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

Limit fried food and fast foods

Talk with your doctor about using alcoholic beverages