

Emergency care for hypoglycemia: How to handle severe episodes safely

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DESCRIPTION

Hypoglycemia, or low blood sugar, is a potentially life-threatening condition that can occur in individuals with diabetes, particularly those who use insulin or medications that increase insulin production. Understanding how to recognize, respond to, and manage severe hypoglycemic episodes is crucial for those living with diabetes and for their caregivers, friends, and family members. The symptoms of mild to moderate hypoglycemia include shakiness, sweating, dizziness, irritability, confusion, and hunger. These early warning signs should prompt immediate action to consume fast-acting carbohydrates, such as glucose tablets, fruit juice, or regular soda, to raise blood sugar levels. However, when blood sugar levels drop significantly, individuals may lose consciousness or become unable to swallow, which makes consuming food or drink impossible. This is when severe hypoglycemia becomes an emergency that requires urgent medical attention. Recognizing the severity of the situation is essential, as untreated severe hypoglycemia can lead to seizures, coma, or death. The glucagon injection typically starts to raise blood sugar within 10-15 minutes, and the person should regain consciousness shortly after. However, it is essential to continue monitoring the individual closely. If they do not respond to the glucagon injection after 15 minutes, a second dose may be necessary, or further medical help should be sought. Once the person regains consciousness, it is important to provide a source of carbohydrates to stabilize their blood sugar and prevent a second hypoglycemic episode. A snack containing both carbohydrates and protein, such as a peanut butter sandwich, is ideal. However, it is essential to ensure that the person can safely swallow before providing food or drink. In some cases, intravenous glucose administered by medical personnel may be necessary to rapidly raise blood sugar levels and stabilize the individual. While immediate emergency care is crucial, it is also important to recognize that the best approach to preventing severe hypoglycemia

is proactive management. Frequent blood sugar monitoring is one of the most effective ways to avoid dangerous drops in glucose levels. People with diabetes should regularly check their blood sugar levels, especially before and after meals, during exercise, and at bedtime. A balanced diet that includes regular meals and snacks, especially those rich in fiber and protein, can help stabilize glucose levels. Exercise also plays a role in blood sugar regulation, but it requires careful planning. Physical activity can lower blood sugar levels, so individuals with diabetes may need to adjust their insulin doses or consume extra carbohydrates before or after exercise to prevent hypoglycemia. It is essential for people with diabetes to work with their healthcare provider to develop an individualized plan for managing their blood sugar, which includes adjusting insulin doses and activity levels based on their lifestyle. Alcohol consumption can also increase the risk of hypoglycemia, particularly when consumed on an empty stomach. Alcohol impairs the liver's ability to release glucose into the bloodstream, which can lead to a dangerous drop in blood sugar hours after drinking. People with diabetes should monitor their blood sugar closely when consuming alcohol and make sure they eat enough food to prevent hypoglycemia. While hypoglycemia is a common and manageable condition, severe episodes require immediate action to prevent life-threatening complications. Recognizing the symptoms early, administering glucagon, and calling for emergency medical assistance are critical steps in managing severe hypoglycemia. Beyond responding to an emergency, proactive management is key to preventing hypoglycemic episodes.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author has nothing to disclose and also state no conflict of interest in the submission of this manuscript.

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