Hypoglycemia Encyclopedia Article

Hypoglycemia

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Hypoglycemia

The condition called hypoglycemia is literally translated as low blood sugar. Hypoglycemia occurs when blood sugar (or blood glucose) concentrations fall below a level necessary to properly support the body's need for energy and stability throughout its cells.

Carbohydrates are the main dietary source of the glucose that is manufactured in the liver and absorbed into the bloodstream to fuel the body's cells and organs. Glucose concentration is controlled by hormones, primarily insulin and glucagon. Glucose concentration is also controlled by epinephrine (adrenalin) and norepinephrine, as well as growth hormone. If these regulators are not working properly, levels of blood sugar can become either excessive (as in hyperglycemia) or inadequate (as in hypoglycemia). If a person has a blood sugar level of 50 mg/dl or less, he or she is considered hypoglycemic, although glucose levels vary widely from one person to another.

Drug-induced hypoglycemia, a complication of **diabetes**, is the most commonly seen and most dangerous form of hypoglycemia. It occurs most often in diabetics who must inject insulin periodically to lower their blood sugar. While other diabetics are also vulnerable to low blood sugar episodes, they have a lower risk of a serious outcome than do insulin-dependent diabetics. Unless recognized and treated immediately, severe hypoglycemia in the insulin-dependent diabetic can lead to generalized convulsions followed by amnesia and unconsciousness. Death, though rare, is a possible outcome.

In insulin-dependent diabetics, hypoglycemia is known as an insulin reaction.

Ideopathic or reactive hypoglycemia (also called postprandial hypoglycemia) occurs when some people eat. A number of reasons for this reaction have been proposed, but no single cause has been identified. In some cases, this form of hypoglycemia appears to be associated with malfunctions or diseases of the liver, pituitary, adrenals, liver, or pancreas. These conditions are unrelated to diabetes.