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Managing Reactive Hypoglycaemia in Cystic Fibrosis

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What is Reactive Hypoglycaemia?

Reactive hypoglycaemia is a medical term describing recurrent episodes of symptomatic hypoglycaemia or low levels of sugar in the blood after eating food/sugary drink. It happens as a result of excessive insulin release triggered by consumption of starchy/sugary foods. Excessive Insulin causes blood sugar level to fall too low and can lead to hypoglycaemia / low blood sugar. This condition can present itself in non-diabetics as well as diagnosed diabetics.

Symptoms: Sweating, shaking, blurred vision, poor concentration, faintness.

How to avoid Reactive Glycaemic episodes:

Eating foods with a low glycaemic index (GI) is the key to control. Foods with a low glycaemic index are broken down slower than those with a high glycaemic index, so there is no sudden rush of glucose in the blood and excessive production of Insulin which results in a Reactive Hypoglycaemic episode.

Here are some examples of low, moderate and high GI foods to help you know what to look for:

Low GI Foods (55 or less)	Moderate GI Foods (56-69)	High GI Foods (70 or more)
Fruit	Pitta bread	Mashed potato
Wholemeal pasta	Basmati rice	White bread
Noodles	Honey	Swede
Tomato soup	Couscous	Bagels
Lentils	Raisins	Rice cakes
Chickpeas	Ice cream	French fries
Baked beans	Wholemeal bread	Some breakfast cereals e.g. Branflakes
Dried apricots	Croissant	Baguette
Crisps	Crumpet	Jacket potato
Vegetables (most)	New potatoes	Parsnips
Orange juice	Shortbread biscuits	White rice

Tips:

- Eat small meals and snacks about every 3 hours.
- Exercise regularly.
- Eat a variety of foods, including meat, poultry, fish, or non-meat sources of protein, foods such as whole-grain bread, fruits, vegetables, and dairy products.
- Choose high-fibre foods and food with a moderate-to-low glycaemic index.
- Avoid or limit foods high in sugar, especially on an empty stomach. Some people with reactive hypoglycaemia may not be able to tolerate any foods containing sugar (cane sugar), or high fructose corn syrup.
- Avoid alcohol, caffeine, and highly starchy foods such as white rice, potatoes, corn, and popcorn (all very high on the glycaemic index).
- Replacing refined carbohydrates e.g. found in sweets and cakes; with fats reduces insulin demand can reduce the severity of symptoms.
- Eat foods with a high glycaemic index with foods with a low glycaemic index, e.g. Jacket potato with baked beans.