Hypoglycemia, Functional

Description
Low blood sugar caused by excessive production of insulin by the pancreas. This is not a disease. Often misdiagnosed when based on symptoms alone. It is not a common medical condition (except in diabetic patients) as many would believe.

Frequent signs and symptoms
The following vary greatly among people in frequency and severity:
- Weakness or faintness
- Sweating
- Excessive hunger
- Headache
- Nervousness and trembling hand
- Confusion
- Personality changes
- Seizures (sometimes)
- Heartbeat irregularities (rare)
- Loss of consciousness (rare)

Causes
- Functional hypoglycemia probably results when the pancreas produces too much insulin in response to sugars and other carbohydrates, heavy exercise, pregnancy or unknown causes.
- The following drugs decrease blood-sugar levels in some persons: Tobacco; caffeine; alcohol; aspirin; sulfonurea medications; phenformin; haloperidol; propoxyphene; chlorpromazine, propranolol, pentamidine, disopyramide.
- Tumor in the pancreas (rare).
- Chronic renal failure.

Risk increases with
- Stress
- Improper diet
- Smoking
- Fatigue or overwork
- Use of drugs, such as those listed above

Preventive measures
- Follow instructions under “Diet”
- Don’t skip meals
- Avoid stress
- Don’t smoke
- Don’t drink alcohol

Expected outcome
Symptoms can be controlled with treatment.

Possible complications
Possibility of an attack while you are swimming, operating machinery, or driving a motor vehicle.

TREATMENT

General measures
- Laboratory studies may be recommended, such as blood-sugar and glucose-tolerance tests.
- Consider lifestyle changes.
- Psychotherapy or counseling to learn to cope with stress.

Medication
Medicine usually is not necessary for this disorder.

Activity
No restrictions.

Diet
Eat 5 or 6 small meals a day that are low in simple carbohydrates, moderate in fats and high in protein. Don’t skip meals. Between-meal snacks should include protein, such as chicken, eggs, cheese, nuts or skim milk, rather than carbohydrates. Avoid highly concentrated sweets, such as candy.

Notify our office if...
You or a family member has symptoms of functional hypoglycemia.