

EXPERIENCES OF HYPOGLYCAEMIA IN ADULTS WITH TYPE 1 DIABETES

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Background:

Type 1 diabetes mellitus (T1DM) is a chronic condition which is treated with insulin either as multiple daily injections or pump therapy. The side effect of insulin treatment is hypoglycaemia which all people with T1DM (PWT1D) will experience on a regular basis.

Aim

The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of hypoglycaemia in adults with T1DM.

Method

A systematic literature review of qualitative studies with a meta-synthesis of included studies was conducted. The systematic literature search was performed in four bibliographic databases: Medline, Embase, CINAHL and PsycINFO. Studies were selected and assessed according to inclusion criteria. Included studies were appraised for quality and the data were synthesised through the 7 steps of meta-ethnography suggested by Noblit and Hare (1987).

Results

PWT1D had different experiences and perceptions of hypoglycaemia. Perceptions of hypoglycaemia both before it happened and after the incidence appeared as an important theme. Many PWT1D described fear of hypoglycaemia especially during night-time or in social situations such as work or with family members. There were many ways of experiencing hypoglycaemia which were often connected with various feelings. Following hypoglycaemia some PWT1D felt ashamed because they had not been able to use their self-management skills to prevent it. Some felt exhausted especially if hypoglycaemia was unexpected. Reliance on others was described by some PWT1D in relation to hypoglycaemia which for some challenged their sense of independence.

Conclusion

Hypoglycaemia is an integral part of life for each PWT1D. Hypoglycaemia is often perceived as a complex bio-psycho-social experience. Hypoglycaemia is associated with different feelings, perceptions and each PWT1D may experience it differently. It is important to explore what PWT1D experience when they have hypoglycaemia to better support them in coping with this.