

Insulin abuse

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Hypoglycaemia: case report

A 30-year-old man with type 1 diabetes mellitus misused his insulin therapy regularly over a 2-year period for the euphoric effects associated with hypoglycaemia. He was subsequently hospitalised after taking an overdose of insulin in an apparent suicide attempt. The patient did not have a history of psychiatric disorders.

The man was hospitalised because he had lost consciousness for 2 hours due to hypoglycaemia. He remained confused for more than 3 days after admission. One month later, cognitive assessment showed impaired intellectual functioning although his premorbid intelligence had been normal. A psychologist recommended that he retire from work on medical grounds.

Three months later, the man was admitted to a psychiatric hospital because of depressed mood and ideas of self harm. At this time, he disclosed that he had been secretly injecting himself with soluble insulin ($3 \times 36\text{U}$ vials) every 2 weeks for the past 2 years to induce hypoglycaemia and experience the affective state that it induced. On the occasion described above, he had taken a much larger dose of insulin (more than 200U), which had led to coma and cognitive impairment.

Author comment: *'We alert doctors to the possibility of insulin as a substance of misuse in patients with insulin dependent diabetes mellitus and poor control, and recommend psychological evaluation where this is suspected.'*

Cassidy EM, et al. Insulin as a substance of misuse in a patient with insulin dependent diabetes mellitus. *BMJ* 319: 1417-1418, 27 Nov 1999 - Ireland

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