

Medications for type 2 diabetes

Many people with type 2 diabetes need medications to help manage their blood glucose levels.

When you are first diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, you may not need medication. However, over a period of time, most people need medications to help lower their blood glucose levels.

Your doctor may prescribe medication to help manage your diabetes. Ask about how these medications work and if there are any side effects you need to know about. Remember that the type – and dose – of the medication you need is likely to change over time.

Diabetes medications

There are several different types of medication that can be used to help manage type 2 diabetes. They are grouped together based on how they work in your body. Each type of medication works differently to help keep your blood glucose levels in your target range.



While most of these medications are available as a tablet, some are taken as an injection. Many medications can be taken in combination. Your doctor will prescribe the medications most suitable for you.

Starting a new diabetes medication

If you are starting a new medication, it's important to talk to your doctor about:

- » what time to take it
- » how much to take, or dosage levels
- » when to take it – before, with or after food
- » how to take it – can tablets be crushed, split or swallowed whole
- » what to do if you forget to take it
- » the common side effects
- » what to do on sick days
- » how to store the medication
- » whether the medication can cause low blood glucose levels (hypoglycaemia or hypo)
- » whether it's suitable to take with other medications you have either been prescribed or supplements/over the counter medicines you are using.

You can also talk to your pharmacist about any new medications when you fill your prescription. When starting a new medication, your doctor may ask you to start monitoring your glucose levels at home if you are not doing this already.

Types of diabetes medications

Class name	How it works	Common side effects	Additional information
Biguanides Common brands: Metformin [®] (MR) Diabex [®] (XR), Diaformin [®] , Metex [®] , Forme [®] t	» Blocks glucose release from the liver » Slows glucose release from the gut » Improves insulin sensitivity	» Nausea » Diarrhoea » Metallic taste in the mouth » Cramps and bloating » Indigestion	Take with or directly after food Avoid if you have severe kidney or liver damage
Sulphonylureas Common brands: Diamicon [®] (MR), Glyade [®] , Amaryl [®] , Glimel [®]	» Stimulates the pancreas to release more insulin	» Hypoglycaemia » Weight gain » Rash	Take just before a meal Avoid skipping meals
DPP-4 inhibitors Common brands: Januvia [®] , Galvus [®] , Trajenta [®] , Onglyza [®] , Nesina [®]	» Blocks the action of DPP-4 enzyme » Stimulates the release of insulin » Blocks the release of glucose from the liver	» Respiratory tract infections » Common cold symptoms (sore throat, runny nose, cough) » Headaches » Musculoskeletal pain	Take with or without food
SGLT2 inhibitors Common brands: Forxiga [®] , Jardiance [®] , Invokana [®]	» Blocks glucose from being re-absorbed by the kidneys	» Urinary tract infections » Yeast infections » Dehydration » Constipation » Increased urination	Can be taken with or without food Have with a full glass of water
Thiazolidinediones Common brands: Avandia [®] , Actos [®]	» Improves the sensitivity of cells to insulin » Decreases glucose release from the liver	» Weight gain » Fluid accumulation	Avoid if you have severe liver or heart damage
Alpha glucosidase inhibitors Common brands: Glucobay [®]	» Slows down the digestion of carbohydrate from food	» Flatulence (wind) » Bloating » Diarrhoea	Take just before food If you are taking this with a medication that can cause hypos, treat hypos with glucose only, e.g., glucose tablets or gel
GLP-1 agonists Common brands: Byetta [®] , Victoza [®]	» Blocks glucose release from the liver » Slows glucose release from the gut » Stimulates the release of insulin » Induces feeling of fullness	» Nausea » Vomiting » Diarrhoea » Constipation » Reflux » Injection site reaction	This medication is injected Tell your doctor if you experience rapid weight loss
Insulin	» Allows glucose to move from the bloodstream to the body cells	» Hypoglycaemia » Injection site reaction » Weight gain	This medication is injected There are different classes of insulin and these vary according to how long they take to start working and how long they last Avoid skipping meals

Once you have started on or changed to a new diabetes medication, your doctor will discuss the scheduling of your next appointment for a review. They may wish to see you more often after you start a new medication.

Your doctor will want to check your blood glucose levels, ask about any side effects or problems you might be having, and decide whether your dose needs to be changed. Your doctor may also discuss adding or starting another type of diabetes medication.

The approach to managing diabetes, and the use of medications, is different for everyone, so let your diabetes health professionals help you work out what treatment is best for you.

Your pharmacist can also assist you with information and advice about the medication you have been prescribed.

Complementary or alternative medicines

Taking complementary, alternative or over-the-counter medicines may affect the diabetes medications you are taking. Always talk to your doctor, pharmacist or credentialed diabetes educator first before starting any of these. They should NEVER REPLACE your prescribed medication.



Tips for taking diabetes medication

- Take the correct dose at the right time, as prescribed by your doctor. Taking your medication incorrectly can cause your blood glucose levels to rise or fall at the wrong time. It can also increase some side effects from that medication.
- Read the information leaflet that comes in the medication box, or ask your pharmacist for information.
- Don't split or crush your tablets without checking with your pharmacist first, as it may change the effectiveness of your medication.
- If you drink alcohol, make sure your doctor knows, as it may affect your medication. Some medications can also cause alcohol-related hypos - ask your doctor if you are at risk.
- If you need help remembering to take your medication, ask your pharmacist about using a dosette box or Webster-pak®.

The NDSS and you

A wide range of services and support is available through the NDSS to help you manage your diabetes. This includes information on diabetes management through the NDSS Helpline and website. The products, services and education programs available can help you stay on top of your diabetes.

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