

Concerns about starting insulin

(for people with type 2 diabetes)

It's common for people with type 2 diabetes to need a combination of medicines for treatment. Insulin is effective for reducing high blood glucose levels. Even so, many people with type 2 diabetes have concerns or feel anxious about starting insulin. If you feel this way, you are not alone. There are many things you can do to adjust to this new way of managing your diabetes.



"In my mind it sort of felt that, if I went on insulin, I wasn't doing well enough with my diet and exercise, even though I was exhausting myself."

Chris, 67, person with type 2 diabetes

Concerns about insulin

People use insulin because it can make a positive difference to their diabetes management. However, sometimes the thought of needing to use insulin can leave people feeling:

- » worried or nervous about needles and the pain of injections
- » fear of hypoglycaemia (low blood glucose levels)
- » embarrassed about what others might think
- » angry about having to take insulin
- » like they have 'failed' (e.g., that they wouldn't have needed insulin if they had taken better care of their diabetes before).

Needing insulin is not your 'fault', and you have not 'failed' in any way. Concerns are natural. However, they become a serious problem when they start to affect daily life or diabetes management if you are, for example:

- » delaying starting insulin, skipping doses or stopping insulin altogether
- » missing medical appointments to avoid talking about insulin
- » blaming yourself or others for needing to start insulin.

If starting insulin is a concern for you, talk to your health professional. They will assess the problem and help you work out strategies to reduce and manage your concerns.

What you can do

Whether or not you currently have concerns about insulin, it's important to look after your emotional well-being.

Some of the following strategies may work for you; others may not, and that's okay. They may give you ideas about other things you could try.

Be informed

Insulin has many benefits. The first step is to inform yourself about what these are. Understanding the benefits of insulin treatment will improve your chances of managing your diabetes well. See the box for the top five reasons to use insulin. Take your time and gather information at your own pace.

A good place to start is by contacting the diabetes organisation in your state or territory. If you are unsure about who to contact, call the NDSS Helpline on 1300 136 588 and they can direct you.

Take care when searching the internet for medical advice. Make sure you consult reliable sources (e.g., professional organisations).

Identify your thoughts and feelings

Recognising what you think and feel about insulin is an important step. Ask yourself:

- » Is this thought/feeling helpful?
- » What is a more helpful way of thinking about the situation?

Talk to people you trust about your concerns (e.g., family, friends or your diabetes health professional). Talking through some of your feelings can help while adjusting to the idea of starting insulin.



Top 5 reasons to use insulin

1. Insulin is a powerful and effective treatment for managing blood glucose levels.
2. Taking insulin may mean you can stop taking — or reduce the dose of — some of your tablets (ask your doctor about this).
3. Insulin helps improve your long-term health. Keeping blood glucose levels within your target range* reduces your risk of long-term complications.
4. Insulin will make you feel better. Keeping blood glucose levels within your target range* will give you more energy to live your life as you want.
5. Insulin comes in fast, intermediate and long-acting forms. Your doctor can help you choose a regimen to fit your lifestyle.

* Talk to your health professional about what is the right target range for you.

Ask questions

It's okay if you don't have all the answers about insulin therapy. Sometimes, people find that writing a list of questions and concerns is a useful way of processing some of their feelings.

- » Bring this list along to your next diabetes appointment so you don't forget the questions or concerns you want to discuss with your health professional.
- » Remember, there are no silly questions or concerns — they are all valid. Your health professional will appreciate anything you mention, as it will help them to offer you the best possible support.

Ask yourself what's important

Understanding what you value is an important step towards making a decision about insulin treatment.

- » Write or think about what is important to you and the way you want to live your life.
- » Ask yourself, 'What can I do to achieve this?'

Make a list

Sometimes, it can help to write down the 'pros and cons' (advantages and disadvantages) when you need to make a tough decision. If your doctor has talked to you about insulin and you are unsure about it, write down a list of reasons to take or not to take insulin. Review your options carefully and discuss them with your health professional.

Get connected

It may help to talk to others who understand what it is like to live with diabetes. It can be reassuring to know that other people face similar challenges and to share ideas about how to cope with them. Join a support group or an online community — read on to find out where you can access 'peer support'.



Talk with a professional

The strategies above may give you some ideas about how to manage any concerns you may have about insulin, but they can't replace professional help. It's always a good idea to talk about your concerns with your health care team.

Who can help?

Your diabetes health professionals

Your diabetes health care team is there to help you with all aspects of your diabetes, including how you feel about insulin. Share your feelings with them if you are comfortable to do so; they will give you non-judgmental support and advice. You may want to talk with your:

- » general practitioner (GP)
- » endocrinologist
- » diabetes educator
- » nurse practitioner
- » dietitian
- » counsellor/psychologist.

Take this fact sheet to your appointment to help get the conversation started. You will probably feel relieved after sharing your feelings, and it will help your health professional to understand how you are feeling.

Together, you can make plans to reduce your concerns. For example, your GP can inform you about what you should expect from insulin so it feels less overwhelming.

- » You might like to attend a structured diabetes education session. Learning more about diabetes and insulin can help overcome fears.
- » There may be group education sessions in your area.

- » Ask your health professional or contact the diabetes organisation in your state/territory for more information.

Your pharmacist

Talk to your pharmacist. They can provide you with information and counselling about using insulin, what the different types of insulin are, and when and how to inject. You can ask them about insulin even if your doctor has not prescribed it yet.

A psychologist

You might like to talk to a psychologist. They will help you find ways to cope with your concerns about using insulin.

Ask your diabetes health professional if they know a psychologist in your area who is familiar with diabetes. You can also find a psychologist near you by visiting the Australian Psychological Society website at psychology.org.au/FaP.

Your GP can tell you if you are eligible for a Mental Health Treatment Plan to reduce the costs of seeing a psychologist.

“I know eventually I probably will have to go to insulin and that’s going to be an absolute pain ... but then it’s going to be an absolute pain if I don’t do it. So that’s going to happen, it’s just general ageing, general deterioration.”

Caroline, 58, person with type 2 diabetes



More information and support

Peer support

ndss.com.au

(search for ‘Publications & Resources’)

To find out what peer support is and how you can access it in your area, refer to the National Diabetes Services Scheme (NDSS) leaflet, Peer support for diabetes.

Diabetes Australia & NDSS

diabetesaustralia.com.au

ndss.com.au

NDSS Helpline 1300 136 588

Through the NDSS, you can access a free national NDSS Helpline to obtain information about diabetes and learn about education programs, peer support groups and other events.

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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