

# Medicines for Diabetes Control

## *When Medicine Is Needed*

Your type of diabetes determines the diabetes medicine you need. For type 1 diabetes, insulin is required because none is being made by the body. For those with type 2 and gestational diabetes, diet and exercise may be enough.

If medicine is needed for gestational diabetes, only insulin can be used. Diabetes pills are dangerous to the baby. For type 2 diabetes, diabetes pills and/or insulin may be taken. **Even with diabetes pills or insulin, a healthy diet and regular exercise are still important for the best diabetes control.**

## Diabetes Pills

There are many diabetes pills. They may be taken together or alone. Sometimes insulin and diabetes pills are both needed. How the medicine works will determine when and how often you take it.

Diabetes pills can lower the blood glucose level in four ways:

- ▶ Make the body produce more insulin.
- ▶ Make the liver produce less glucose (sugar).
- ▶ Make the cells use insulin better.
- ▶ Slow the absorption of carbohydrate (starches and sugar) after meals.

## Insulin and Other Injectables

There are different kinds of insulin. Some act quickly, while others last over 24 hours. Your doctor will decide the type, amount, and frequency of insulin doses you will take. Rapid-acting insulin begins to work about 15 minutes after injection, peaks in about 1 hour, and continues to work for 2

to 4 hours. Regular- or short-acting insulin usually reaches the bloodstream within 30 minutes after injection, peaks anywhere from 2 to 3 hours after injection, and is effective for approximately 3 to 6 hours. Intermediate-acting insulin generally reaches the bloodstream about 2 to 4 hours after injection, peaks 4 to 12 hours later, and is effective for about 12 to 18 hours. Long-acting insulin reaches the bloodstream several hours after injection and tends to lower glucose levels fairly evenly over a 24-hour period. See more at: <http://www.diabetes.org/living-with-diabetes/treatment-and-care/medication/insulin/insulin-basics.html>.

Many people mix two different insulins to control their blood sugar over the course of the day. Some regular- and intermediate-acting insulins are already premixed. Other people use an insulin pump to deliver small amounts of short-acting insulin throughout the day.

In addition to insulin there are several other injectable medications used to treat diabetes.

## Side Effects

Ask your health care provider about the side effects of these medicines. **Report any side effects right away to your doctor.** One of the most common side effects is hypoglycemia (low blood sugar).

Symptoms of hypoglycemia include:

- ▶ Shakiness
- ▶ Cold sweat
- ▶ Hunger
- ▶ Dizziness
- ▶ Irritability
- ▶ Any sudden personality change

You may have your own special symptoms. Whatever they are, do not ignore them. Check your blood sugar if possible. If your blood sugar is too low, eat

or drink some quick carbohydrate, such as 8 ounces of reduced fat milk, three glucose tablets, five hard candies, 4 ounces of juice, or a soft drink with sugar.

Rest for 15 minutes, and check again. If the reading is still low, treat again. Don't overtreat, because your blood sugar level may then get too high.

If a meal is due within 30 minutes, eat as soon as possible. If the meal is later, have a glass of milk or some cheese and crackers to prevent hypoglycemia before the meal. If hypoglycemia happens often, your medicine, diet, or activity may need to be adjusted.

Keep a record of your blood sugar readings, your food, medicine, and activity to help you decide if a change is needed.

## Questions to Ask

1. Do I have written instructions about how to take my diabetes medicine?
2. What side effects could happen?
3. If I have hypoglycemia, how will I treat it?