

# Control your diabetes *For Life:*

Circular 569 F

## Diabetes Medications

- People with type 1 diabetes are not able to make their own insulin.
- People with type 2 diabetes may need to take diabetes pills or insulin.
- Diabetes pills are not a form of insulin.
- Insulin cannot be taken by mouth.
- All diabetes medicines work better if you eat a healthy diet and exercise daily.
- Low blood glucose is caused by too much medicine, not enough food, or greater than normal exercise without adjusting medications.

Many people can successfully control their diabetes without using medications. If you need diabetes medications, know how and when they work to improve blood glucose control. There are many new medicines available for people with diabetes today. They fall into two main categories: **insulin** and **oral medications** (pills).

**Insulin** is a hormone made by the pancreas. It acts like a key to open the door for glucose to enter cells, where it is used for energy. If glucose cannot get into the cells, it stays in the blood and causes blood glucose to rise. When glucose moves into the cells, it leaves the blood, lowering blood glucose.

**Oral diabetes medications** are pills. They are not insulin. Insulin is a protein that is digested if taken by mouth. Oral medications work to lower blood glucose in different ways. They coax the body to make more insulin, help the body use insulin better, stop the liver from making glucose, or slow down how quickly glucose from food gets into the blood. Ask your provider or pharmacist to explain how your diabetes medication works.

People who have **type 1 diabetes** are not able to make insulin and require injections to stay alive.

People who have **type 2 diabetes** can control their diabetes in many different ways. If detected early enough and the body still makes insulin, type 2 diabetes can be controlled well by diet and exercise alone.

Lifestyle changes, such as eating a healthy diet, taking part in daily physical activity, and watching your weight, often help the body use its own insulin. Over time, the body may lose the ability to make insulin. Your health care provider



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may prescribe oral medication to control your blood glucose. Oral medication alone may work well for some people, but others may also require insulin injections.

There are several different types of insulin, each with different characteristics (actions). Types of insulin may differ by when it starts to work, when it is most active, and how long it is active.

Ask your provider or pharmacist to explain the action of your insulin. You need this information to plan meals (what and how much to eat) and to time your injections.

### **Taking Diabetes Medications**

Make sure you understand how much medicine to take (dose), and when and how often you should take it. Bring all of your medications to clinic visits, so your provider can make sure there are no problems with the combination of drugs you take. Try to fill all of your prescriptions at the same pharmacy. This way your pharmacist can alert you to any problems. For best results:

- Take your medications as prescribed.
- Take medications at the same time each day as part of your routine, such as when you brush your teeth.
- Keep medications where you can see them to remind you.
- Give yourself cues to remind you to take medicines—leave a note on your bathroom mirror, or in your lunch box.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Eat meals at the same time each day with the same amounts of food.
- Spread your meals out—three smaller meals are better than one big meal.
- Get some kind of physical activity everyday—one to two hours after meals is best.

## **Where to Go for More Information**

■ Your health care provider

■ American Diabetes Association:  
**1-800-DIABETES**

■ National Diabetes Education Program:  
**1-800-438-5383** or visit the World Wide Web at **ndep.nih.gov** or **www.cdc.gov**

■ Your county Extension office

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