



the Diabetes Education Program

Starting insulin

Learn how insulin may
help better control
your blood sugar



Cornerstones4Care



When insulin is being suggested

If your doctor has told you that it's time to start on insulin, it's important for you to know that you are not alone. Everyone with type 1 diabetes needs to take insulin. Many people with type 2 diabetes find that they too need to take insulin as their beta cells—the cells in the pancreas that make insulin—stop working over time.

Even if you have been doing everything you can to manage your diabetes, you may still benefit from adding insulin to your diabetes care plan. Adding insulin doesn't mean your diabetes is getting worse. And it doesn't mean that you've done anything wrong in managing your diabetes. It just means that your diabetes has changed over time, and your current medicines are no longer able to control your blood sugar. Insulin can be just the help you need to improve your blood sugar.



Insulin helps to control blood sugar. But healthy eating options and physical activity are also a very important part of your diabetes care plan.

When should I take insulin?

Your plan for taking insulin will depend on your daily routine, the times when your blood sugar tends to increase, and the type of insulin you take. Talk with your diabetes care team about what would work best for you. There are different types of insulin you can take. Most people start insulin treatment with a long-acting insulin. Long-acting insulin is also called basal insulin.

In people without diabetes, the pancreas releases a small, steady amount of insulin during the day and night. The long-acting insulin you take acts the same way, to provide steady insulin levels during the day and night. It is often taken before bed or first thing in the morning.

Your diabetes care team will tell you when to take your insulin. You and your diabetes care team will design your insulin plan just for you. Your plan will be made to match:

The food
you eat



Your physical
activity plan



Your blood sugar levels,
as shown by your daily
self-checks and A1C



Why can't I take insulin in pill form?

Insulin is made of protein. If you took it as a pill, the acid in your stomach would break it down during digestion, keeping it from working. That's why insulin has to be injected.

How do I inject insulin?

This may be your first time giving yourself an injection. But your diabetes care team will teach you safe and comfortable ways to inject your insulin. You can inject insulin by using:

A prefilled pen

A prefilled pen looks like a writing pen. Pen needles are often shorter and thinner than those used on syringes. To take the right dose, you dial your dose on the pen.



A syringe filled from a bottle of insulin

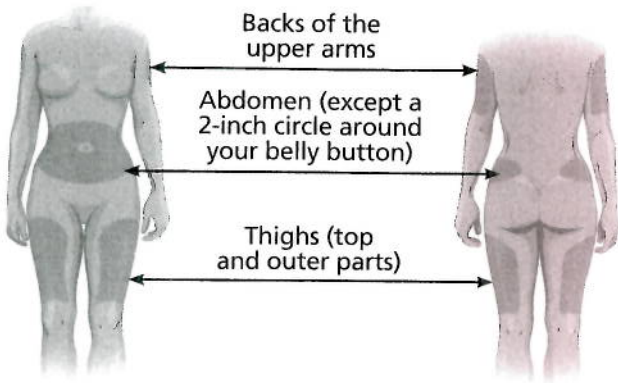
A syringe is a hollow tube with a plunger on one end and a needle on the other. You stick the needle into a bottle of insulin and draw up your dose.



Talk with your diabetes care team to decide on the best way for you to inject your insulin. The device you are using may have a toll-free number or a Web site where you can find additional help and support.

Where do I inject insulin?

You can give your insulin injections in these areas of the body:



Insulin should be injected in the same general area of the body each time. But to avoid lumps or buildup of scar tissue, injections should not be given in the exact same spot each day.

Possible side effects of insulin

Low blood sugar is a possible side effect of insulin. When your blood sugar gets too low, you may feel weak or tired, hungry, dizzy or shaky, nervous or upset, or sweaty. You may also notice a fast heart rate or blurry vision.

Ask your diabetes care team what low blood sugar is for you. For most people, it is less than 70 mg/dL. If your blood sugar is low, or if you think your blood sugar is low but you cannot check it at that time, follow the rule of 15: Eat or drink something with 15 grams of carbohydrate right away, such as 4 ounces (½ cup) of regular fruit juice, 4 ounces (½ cup) of regular soda pop (not diet), 3 or 4 glucose tablets, or 5 to 6 candies that you can chew quickly (such as mints).

Wait 15 minutes and then check your blood sugar again. If it is still low, eat or drink something with 15 grams of carbohydrate again. Once your blood sugar returns to normal, eat a meal or snack. This can help keep low blood sugar from coming back.

Talk with your diabetes care team about any concerns you have about side effects.

Insulin tips

Here are some tips for using and storing your insulin:

- Follow the instructions on the label
- It may be okay to store insulin at room temperature after you have opened it, but check the label to make sure
- Do not store your insulin near extreme heat or extreme cold. Never store insulin in the freezer, in direct sunlight, or in the glove compartment of a car. Insulin becomes less effective when exposed to extreme heat or cold. The longer the exposure to extreme temperatures, the less effective it becomes
- Do not use your insulin if it looks different from the way it should
- Do not use insulin after the expiration date on the label

Your insulin plan

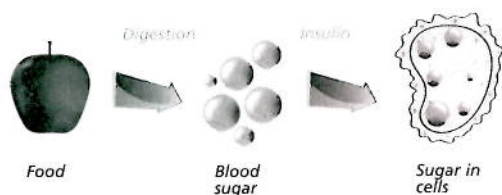
Your insulin plan is made just for you. Ask your diabetes care team whether you should adjust your insulin dose depending on your blood sugar levels. Write your insulin plan in the space below.



What does insulin do in the body?

The cells of the body depend on sugar for energy. Sugar comes from the food you eat. (All foods release varying amounts of sugar when you eat. Some foods, such as desserts and starchy foods, release more sugar.)

When you eat, sugar goes into your blood. Insulin is the key that allows the sugar to move from the blood into your body's cells. Without enough insulin, sugar builds up in your blood, causing high blood sugar.



In people with type 1 diabetes, the beta cells no longer make insulin. So people with type 1 diabetes need to take insulin in order to use the sugar from the food they eat.

In people with type 2 diabetes, the beta cells may still make some insulin. But they don't make enough. Or the body doesn't use the insulin correctly. Over time, as the body makes less and less insulin, many people may need to take insulin.

Questions for your diabetes care team

Most people have questions when they first start taking insulin. Write your questions below so you won't forget to ask your team. Write their answers below as well.

Q:

A:

Q:

A:

Q:

A:



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the Diabetes Education Program



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