

Diabetes: Just the Basics

Diabetes Medicines: Pills

Diabetes pills are not for everyone with diabetes. People with type 1 diabetes must use insulin and many people with type 2 diabetes take insulin to treat their diabetes. However, many people with type 2 diabetes can manage their diabetes with pills, or pills and insulin.

It is important to know the name of your diabetes medicine, how it is taken, the reasons for taking it, and possible side effects. Diabetes pills work in different ways and may be used together. The goal is to help control your blood sugar.

Some pills:

- Stop your liver from releasing too much sugar
- Help your pancreas to make more insulin
- Help your body better use your insulin
- Slow the digestion of some carbohydrates

When should I call my healthcare provider?

- If you have very low or very high blood sugars
- If you are concerned about any new side effects
- If you stop taking your pills for any reason

What may affect how my pills work?

- Alcohol
- Over-the-counter medications
- Herbal preparations

Steps To Better Health

- Take your pills at the right time every day
- Eat at regular meal times
- Keep a list of your medications in one place and keep it up to date
- Check your list of medications with your healthcare provider at every visit

Oral Medications (Pills) for Type 2 Diabetes

There are five classes of pills and several combinations of these pills for people with type 2 diabetes. Each has a different way of helping you control your diabetes. Your healthcare provider will decide which pills are best for you.

Class	Generic or brand name	Where they work	How they control your blood sugar	Side effects/ Comments
Alpha-glucosidase Inhibitors	Acarbose/ Precose	Intestine	Slow the digestion of starches. Post-meal blood sugars are lowered.	Bloating, gas, & diarrhea. Usually decrease after first 6 months. Take with first bite of food.
Biguanides	Metformin/ Glucophage	Liver and Muscle cells	Stop the liver from releasing too much glucose. Also makes muscle cells more sensitive to insulin. Pre-meal blood sugars are lowered.	Bloating decreased appetite, nausea, and diarrhea. Usually disappear after a few weeks. Take with meals.
Meglitinides	Starlix/ Prandin	Pancreas	Help pancreas release more insulin. Post-meal blood sugars are lowered.	Low blood sugar. Take up to 30 minutes before each meal. Don't take if you are skipping a meal.
Sulfonylureas	Glyburide/ Glipizide/ Glimepiride	Pancreas	Help pancreas to release more insulin.	Low blood sugar and weight gain. Take with meals. Don't take if you are skipping a meal.
Thiazolidinediones (TZDs)	Avandia/ Actos	Muscle cells	Make muscle and liver cells sensitive to insulin. Fasting blood sugars are lowered.	Weight gain and swelling. Takes 4-6 weeks to see an effect on your blood sugar.
Combination Pills	Glucovance Avandamet Metaglip Actoplus met Avandaryl Dueact			