

# Living Well with Diabetes

## Medication Overview

Most people with diabetes need to take medicine to help them control their blood sugar. These medicines include diabetes pills and insulin shots.

All people with type 1 diabetes need to take insulin shots to replace the insulin that their bodies no longer make.

Most people with type 2 diabetes need diabetes pills to help their own insulin work better. Many people with type 2 diabetes need insulin shots. Some people with type 2 diabetes need both diabetes pills and insulin shots to help them control their blood sugar.

There are a small number of people with type 2 diabetes who don't need any diabetes medicine at first. These people can keep their blood sugar in a normal range by watching what they eat, getting physical activity, and staying at a healthy weight.

Even people who didn't start out needing to take medicine, usually begin taking medicine after they've had diabetes for awhile. It's important to note that if a person is asked to start on oral medication or insulin, it's usually NOT because the person did something wrong. It's just the next step in helping to gain better control of blood sugar levels.

### Diabetes Pills

Pills used to treat diabetes don't contain insulin. For diabetes pills to work, a person's body must still be producing some of its own insulin.

Several types of pills are available to help people control their blood sugar. Your doctor will prescribe the pill that will work best for you.

### Insulin

Insulin shots are used as a part of diabetes treatment, along with meal planning and physical activity, to help people keep their blood sugar within a normal range.

If your doctor prescribes insulin for you, you'll learn how to give yourself insulin shots, what insulin to use, how much to take, and when to take it. You'll also learn how insulin can make your blood sugar drop too low – a condition called hypoglycemia – and what to do if that happens.

## Other injectable diabetes medicine

New medicines that can help people gain even better blood sugar control include medicine that they inject. If you and your doctor decide an injectable medicine is right for you, you'll learn how and when to give yourself these shots along with taking your other diabetes medicines.

## Other medicines to lower health risks

In addition to taking medicine to control blood sugar, your doctor may suggest that you take other medicines to lower your risk for heart disease and other health problems that are more common in people with diabetes.

Having diabetes increases your risk of heart disease and other complications. It also increases your risk for developing these conditions at an earlier age. For these reasons, many people with diabetes need medicines that help protect them against heart attack, kidney disease, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol levels.

Kaiser Permanente recommends the following for patients with diabetes:

- A statin, such as atorvastatin, for most people over 40. Statins are drugs that lower blood cholesterol. They also protect against heart disease in people with diabetes, even those who don't have high cholesterol.
- Low-dose (81 mg) aspirin might lower the risk for heart attack and stroke for some people. Discuss this therapy with your provider to see if it's right for you.
- An ACE inhibitor, such as lisinopril, for most people over 40. ACE inhibitors not only treat high blood pressure and heart disease, they protect against kidney damage in people with diabetes.
- In addition to an ACE inhibitor, your doctor might suggest other medicines to help you keep your blood pressure numbers in a safe range.

Talk to your doctor to find out if, and when, you should start taking these medicines.

## For more information

Visit the Health and Wellness Resources section on the Kaiser Permanente website at [kp.org/wa](http://kp.org/wa) for more information about diabetes and other health topics.