

# diabetes medications

## HOW THEY WORK

There are many types of diabetes medications which work in different ways to help you control your blood sugars. To lower risk of complications, the goal for most people with diabetes is to get to an A1C to less than 7 percent. A1C is a measure of blood sugar control over the previous 2–3 months.

**Medication type:** biguanides  
**Main site of action:** liver  
**How it controls blood sugar:**  
keeps the liver from releasing too much glucose  
**Names:** metformin (*Glucophage*)

**Medication type:** insulin  
Most patients will choose to add insulin to achieve or maintain their blood sugar goals. Insulin can be injected or inhaled and helps the cells in the body get the blood sugar or glucose out of the bloodstream and into the cells where it can be used to provide energy for the body.

**Medication type:** injectable hormones  
Injectable hormones are newer drugs that may also help you control your sugars.  
**Names:** pramlintide (*Symlin*)  
exenatide (*Byetta*)

**Medication type:** alpha-glucosidase inhibitors  
**Main site of action:** intestines  
**How it controls blood sugar:** slows the digestion of carbohydrates; after-meal blood sugar peaks are lower  
**Names:** miglitol (*Glyset*), acarbose (*Precose*)

**Medication type:** sulfonylureas and glinides  
**Main site of action:** pancreas  
**How it controls blood sugar:**  
helps pancreas to make more insulin  
**Names:** glipizide (*Glucotrol*)  
glyburide (*Micronase, DiaBeta*)  
tolazamide (*Tolinase*)  
glinides: repaglinide (*Prandin*), nateglinide (*Starlix*)

**Medication type:** thiazolidinediones  
**Main site of action:** muscle cells  
**How it controls blood sugar:**  
makes muscle cells more sensitive to insulin  
**Names:** pioglitazone (*Actos*), rosiglitazone (*Avandia*)

## Information to remember about diabetes medicines

- Diabetes medicines help to lower high blood sugars. They do *not* take the place of healthy eating and exercise.
- Know when and how to take the medicines. Do not skip a dose.
- Wear a medical alert bracelet

### Questions to ask your diabetes care team about your diabetes medications:

- When do I need to take the medicine—before a meal, with a meal, or after a meal?
- How often should I take the medicine?
- Should I take the medicine at the same time every day?
- What should I do if I forget to take my medicine?
- What kind of side effects could I have and what symptoms should I look for?
- How should I manage my medications when I am sick and can't keep my food or drinks down as usual?

### Tips to help you remember to take your medications

Everyone struggles with remembering to do things regularly. There are a number of ways that can help you remember.

*Below, check off things you might try:*

- Make a simple chart and post it in an obvious place where you will see it every day, like on the mirror in the bathroom.
- Set an alarm clock or watch as a reminder.
- Establish a daily routine for taking your medications, such as at bedtime, mealtime, or the beginning of a daily TV show, such as the evening news.
- Use a pillbox that has sections, representing the days of the week.
- Record taking your medications on a wallet card or calendar.
- Can you think of others?

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This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have further questions, please consult your doctor. If you have questions or need additional information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse any brand names; any similar products may be used.