



If you have Type 2 diabetes, it is very important to keep your blood sugar (glucose) levels in a healthy range. Sulfonylureas are medications that help your body control blood sugar.

Here are answers to questions people often ask about taking sulfonylureas.

## How do sulfonylureas help with diabetes?

Sulfonylureas help the pancreas (the organ that makes insulin) release more insulin into the blood. Sulfonylureas are a group of medicines that include:

- glipizide (Glucotrol)
- glyburide (DiaBeta, Micronase)

Here's how it works: Insulin is an important hormone for controlling blood sugar. Your body needs insulin to get sugar out of the blood and into your cells, where it can be used as energy.

When you have type 2 diabetes, your pancreas may no longer make enough insulin. Without enough insulin, you will have high amounts of sugar in your blood. Over time, high blood sugar levels can cause health problems, some of which can become very serious. Uncontrolled high blood sugar can cause kidney damage, loss of vision, and nerve damage that can lead to loss of limbs.

Sulfonylureas can help you avoid these health problems by increasing the amount of insulin in your blood. More insulin means better control of your blood sugar level. Sulfonylureas are usually taken with other diabetes medications to keep blood sugar in the target range. Well-controlled blood sugars help lower the chance that you will develop complications from diabetes.

## How should I take a sulfonylurea?

Take sulfonylurea medications 30 minutes before a meal. Your doctor may ask you to take your pills once or twice a day.

## How will I know if the medication is working?

Regular home blood sugar testing is the easiest way to see how your medicine is working. Be sure to:

- Ask your health care team how often to test your blood sugar at home.

- Write down and keep track of your results. This can help you see what changes in eating, activity, or medicine may help you keep your blood sugar in a healthy range.
- Get an A1C blood test done at least every six months. This test also gives you an estimated Average Glucose (eAG) result. Together, these two results measure your average blood sugar over the past two to three months.

## What problems could I have taking a sulfonylurea?

Most people who take a sulfonylurea don't have any problems. A few people may have mild stomach upset, heartburn or nausea. A skin reaction such as redness or itching is rare. Because you may get sunburned more easily when you take this medication, wear sunscreen everyday.

Tell your health care team if you have had a severe allergy to sulfa drugs including sores in your mouth or throat. You may also be allergic to sulfonylureas.

Sulfonylureas can lower the blood sugar in your body too much. This is called hypoglycemia or low blood sugar. You can experience low blood sugars if the dose of the sulfonylurea is too high, if you skip a meal, or if you exercise

more than usual. Call your health care team if your blood sugar levels before you eat are below 70 mg/dL three or more times in one week. You may need to adjust the amount (dose) of sulfonylurea you are taking.

## When should I treat low blood sugar?

For most people a blood sugar level below 70 mg/dL is too low. Signs of low blood sugar may include feeling shaky, sweaty, nervous, hungry, angry, or light-headed. If you feel any of these symptoms, test your blood sugar right away (if possible).

Use the 15/15 rule to treat low blood sugar:

1. Eat or drink **15 grams** of a carbohydrate that your body can absorb quickly. For example:
  - 3 to 4 glucose tablets
  - 1 tube glucose gel
  - 1/2 cup fruit juice
  - 1 cup low-fat or fat free milk
2. Wait **15 minutes** and test again. If your reading is still under 70 mg/dL, eat or drink another 15 grams of carbohydrate.
3. Repeat steps 1-3 one more time if blood sugars are still under 70 mg/dL.

If your blood sugars are back in the normal range, eat a small meal such as a half of a small sandwich with a glass of milk to keep your blood sugar in a safe range.

If your blood sugars are still low after following the 15/15 rule, call the Appointment and Advice line or your health care team right away. Always carry a source of carbohydrate like the ones listed above so that you can treat low blood sugar as soon as it happens.

## How can I manage my medications?

Refill your medicines at least 2 weeks before you run out. We have several convenient ways to help you refill your medications:

- Online. Register on [kp.org](http://kp.org) and then visit [kp.org/rxrefill](http://kp.org/rxrefill). Have your medicine mailed to your home for little or no extra charge.
- By phone. You can find the Easy Refill number on the upper corner of your prescription bottle or package.
- In person at your local Kaiser Permanente pharmacy.

Keep a list of the medication names and doses you take each day and keep it up to date. Write down any over the counter medications, herbs, or supplements

you use. Note any drug or food allergies you may have.

When you start any new medication or supplement, ask the pharmacist to check if it might cause problems (interact) with your other medications.

Wear medical identification at all times. For more information call 1-888-633 4298 or go to [MedicAlert.org](http://MedicAlert.org).

### Additional resources

To learn more about diabetes, visit your physician's home page at [kp.org/mydoctor](http://kp.org/mydoctor), where you can:

- View your lab results, schedule appointments, refill prescriptions, and email your doctor.
- View videos on how to treat low blood sugar and prevent complications
- Try a personalized online diabetes program called HealthMedia@Care™ for Diabetes.
- Access health and drug encyclopedias, find health education classes, and more.

You can also contact the Health Education Department near you for books, videos, classes, and more resources on diabetes and other health topics.

Diabetes is a chronic condition which has been shown to worsen in cases where domestic violence is present. If you are being hurt in anyway by a partner or spouse, there is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to [ndvh.org](http://ndvh.org).