

Pioglitazone (Actos): How it helps keep you healthy



If you have type 2 diabetes, it is very important to keep your blood sugar (glucose) levels in a healthy range. Pioglitazone (Actos) is a medication that helps your body control blood sugar.

Here are answers to questions people often ask about taking pioglitazone (Actos).

How does Actos help with diabetes?

Actos helps your muscle cells use insulin better and reduces the amount of sugar (glucose) the liver releases into the blood.

Here's how it works: Your liver usually stores extra sugar and releases it when your body needs the glucose for energy. Insulin is an important hormone in this process of controlling blood sugar.

You need insulin to get sugar out of the blood and into your cells, where your body can use it.

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.

Actos can help you avoid these problems by making tissue in the body, especially muscle, more responsive to insulin. Actos is usually taken with other diabetes medications to help 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 Actos?

Take Actos once a day. You can take it either with or without food.

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 medication 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 if I take Actos?

Actos is usually safe and effective. However, Actos is *not* safe for people with heart failure or liver problems. The most common side effect from taking Actos is water retention. This may cause weight gain and swelling.

Some important things to remember when taking Actos

Call your healthcare team if you have any:

- Unusual weight gain or uncomfortable swelling in your legs, ankles, or feet (edema)
- Unusual shortness of breath or trouble breathing
- Increased weakness or fatigue

Taken by itself, Actos should *not* cause low blood sugar (hypoglycemia). However, you may have low blood sugar levels if you add Actos to other diabetes medicines. Call the Appointment and Advice line or your health care team if your

Pioglitazone (Actos): How it helps keep you healthy

blood sugar levels before you eat are below 70 mg/dL three or more times in one week.

Actos may increase a woman's chance of getting pregnant. If this is a concern, discuss your birth control choices with your healthcare team.

When should I treat a 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 good 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 two weeks before you run out. We have several convenient ways to help you refill your medications:

- Online. Register on kp.org and then visit kp.org/rxrefill. Have your medicine mailed to your home for little or no charge.
- By phone. Look for 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 take. 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.

Additional resources

To learn more about diabetes, visit your physician's home page at 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 additional 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 any way by a partner or spouse, there is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to ndvh.org.