**Patient education: Treatment for type 2 diabetes (The Basics)**

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

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**What are the goals of type 2 diabetes treatment?** — The goals of treatment for type 2 diabetes (sometimes called type 2 "diabetes mellitus") are:

●To keep a person's blood sugar at or near a normal level

●To prevent future health problems that can happen in people with diabetes

**How is type 2 diabetes treated?** — Type 2 diabetes can be treated with:

●Diet changes

●Lifestyle changes

●Medicines

Your doctor or nurse will work with you to make a treatment plan that is right for you.

**What diet and lifestyle changes might be part of my treatment?** — As part of your treatment, your doctor or nurse might recommend that you:

●Lose weight

●Eat healthy foods

●Get regular exercise

●Not smoke

Making these lifestyle changes is as important as taking your medicines.

**What medicines are used to treat type 2 diabetes?** — Different medicines can be used to treat type 2 diabetes. The first medicine that most people with type 2 diabetes take is a pill called metformin (brand name: Glucophage).

**How do I know if my treatment is working?** — One way to know if your treatment is working is to check your blood sugar level. People can use a device called a "blood glucose monitor" to check their blood sugar level at home. If your doctor recommends that you use a blood glucose monitor, he or she will teach you how and tell you when to use it.

Your doctor can also do a blood test called an "A1C." This test checks what your blood sugar level has been over the past 2 to 3 months.

**What if my blood sugar level is still higher than normal?** — If your blood sugar level is still higher than normal after you have been taking metformin for 2 to 3 months, your doctor might add a second medicine to your treatment.

**Which second medicine will I take?** — There are different medicines your doctor can prescribe. The choice will depend, in part, on your weight, your other health problems, and if you want to use a shot.

Some of these medicines can cause low blood sugar as a side effect. Symptoms of low blood sugar can include:

●Sweating and shaking

●Feeling hungry

●Feeling worried

Low blood sugar should be treated quickly because it can cause you to pass out. Your doctor or nurse will tell you ahead of time how to treat low blood sugar.

**What is insulin?** — Insulin is a medicine that lowers a person's blood sugar level. People who use insulin might use it as a second medicine, or as their only medicine. It usually comes in the form of a shot that people give themselves. One brand of insulin comes in the form of a powder that is breathed into the lungs.

If your doctor prescribes insulin, he or she will tell you which form to use and show you how to give yourself a shot, if needed (figure 1). He or she will also tell you:

●Which type of insulin to use – There are different types of the insulin that come in a shot. Some types work faster or last longer than others.

●How much insulin to use

●When to use it

●When to check your blood sugar level

An insulin dose often needs to change when a person gets sick, has surgery, travels, or eats out. Ask your doctor or nurse how to change your dose during these times.

**What other treatments might I need?** — Sometimes, people with type 2 diabetes need medicines to treat health problems that often affect people with diabetes. For example, people who have high blood pressure might take medicines to lower their blood pressure. This can reduce their chances of having a heart attack or stroke.

**When should I see my doctor or nurse?** — Most people with diabetes see their doctor or nurse every 3 or 4 months. When you see your doctor or nurse, he or she will talk with you about your medicines and blood sugar levels. If your blood sugar levels are not in control, your doctor or nurse might make changes to your treatment plan.

Taking care of diabetes can be hard, and some people feel sad or worried about their diabetes. Let your doctor or nurse know if you feel this way so that he or she can help.

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