

# Diabetes Medication Side Effects

## Quick Reference

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*Your essential guide to understanding diabetes medications*

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### How to Use This Guide

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Keep this reference card handy when starting a new diabetes medication or if you experience unexpected symptoms. Understanding potential side effects helps you:

- Know what to expect when starting a medication
- Recognize when side effects are normal vs concerning
- Have informed conversations with your doctor
- Make safer decisions about food and drug interactions

**⚠ Important:** Never stop or change your medication without consulting your doctor first.  
This guide is educational—not a replacement for medical advice.

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### Metformin (Glycomet, Glucophage)

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The most commonly prescribed diabetes medication worldwide

## How It Works

Reduces glucose production in the liver and improves insulin sensitivity.

## Common Side Effects (Usually Improve Over Time)

Side Effect	What to Do
Nausea	Take with food; start with low dose
Diarrhea	Usually improves in 2-4 weeks
Stomach upset	Extended-release version may help
Metallic taste	Temporary; use sugar-free mints
Loss of appetite	Often beneficial for weight management

## Serious Side Effects (Call Doctor Immediately)

- ⚠ Severe weakness or fatigue
- ⚠ Muscle pain
- ⚠ Difficulty breathing
- ⚠ Unusual drowsiness
- ⚠ Cold or blue skin

**Warning Sign:** These may indicate lactic acidosis—a rare but serious condition. Seek emergency care if multiple symptoms occur together.

## Key Interactions

Avoid/Limit	Why
Excessive alcohol	Increases lactic acidosis risk
IV contrast dye	Stop metformin before scans; resume after 48 hours
Chronic kidney disease	May need dose adjustment

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## Sulfonylureas (Glimepiride, Gliclazide, Glipizide)

Stimulates your pancreas to release more insulin

### Common Brand Names

Amaryl, Diamicron, Glucotrol, Glynase

### Common Side Effects

Side Effect	What to Do
Hypoglycemia (low blood sugar)	Always carry glucose tablets; eat regular meals
Weight gain	Monitor portions; stay active
Dizziness	Check blood sugar; may be low
Headache	Usually temporary
Skin rash	Report to doctor

## Serious Side Effects (Call Doctor Immediately)

- ⚠ Severe hypoglycemia (confusion, unconsciousness)
- ⚠ Jaundice (yellowing of skin/eyes)
- ⚠ Unusual bleeding or bruising
- ⚠ Persistent sore throat or fever

## Key Interactions

Avoid/Caution	Why
Skipping meals	High risk of hypoglycemia
Alcohol	Masks hypoglycemia symptoms
NSAIDs (ibuprofen, aspirin)	May increase hypoglycemia risk
Beta-blockers	Mask hypoglycemia warning signs

## SGLT2 Inhibitors (Dapagliflozin, Empagliflozin, Canagliflozin)

Removes excess glucose through urine; protects heart and kidneys

### Common Brand Names

Forxiga, Jardiance, Invokana

### Common Side Effects

Side Effect	What to Do
Increased urination	Stay well hydrated
Urinary tract infections	Maintain good hygiene; drink water
Genital yeast infections	Keep area clean and dry
Thirst	Increase water intake
Low blood pressure	Rise slowly from sitting/lying

## Serious Side Effects (Call Doctor Immediately)

- ⚠️ Signs of ketoacidosis: nausea, vomiting, stomach pain, confusion, unusual fatigue
- ⚠️ Severe UTI symptoms: blood in urine, fever, back pain
- ⚠️ Signs of dehydration: extreme thirst, very dark urine
- ⚠️ Fournier's gangrene: severe pain/swelling in genital area (rare but serious)

## Key Interactions & Precautions

Situation	Action
Surgery planned	Stop 3-4 days before (ask doctor)
Fasting (religious/medical)	May need to pause medication
Diuretics (water pills)	Watch for dehydration
Heavy exercise	Stay extra hydrated

## 💡 Pro Tips for SGLT2 Users

- Drink 8-10 glasses of water daily
  - Practice good genital hygiene
  - Test ketones if feeling unwell
  - Great for heart and kidney protection!
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## GLP-1 Receptor Agonists (Semaglutide, Liraglutide, Dulaglutide)

Mimics gut hormones to control appetite and blood sugar

### Common Brand Names

Ozempic, Wegovy, Victoza, Trulicity, Rybelsus

### Common Side Effects (Often Improve Over Time)

Side Effect	What to Do
Nausea	Eat smaller meals; avoid fatty foods
Vomiting	Dose usually started low and increased slowly
Diarrhea	Stay hydrated; usually temporary
Constipation	Increase fiber and water
Decreased appetite	This is often the desired effect
Injection site reactions	Rotate injection sites

## Serious Side Effects (Call Doctor Immediately)

- ⚠ Severe stomach pain that doesn't go away (pancreatitis)
- ⚠ Vision changes
- ⚠ Rapid heartbeat
- ⚠ Signs of thyroid problems: neck lump, trouble swallowing, hoarseness
- ⚠ Signs of kidney problems: swelling, decreased urination

## Key Interactions & Precautions

Situation	Action
History of pancreatitis	Generally not recommended
Thyroid cancer history	Contraindicated
Other diabetes meds	May need dose adjustments
Oral medications	Absorption timing may be affected

### Tips for Managing GI Side Effects

1. Start with the lowest dose
2. Eat slowly and stop when satisfied
3. Avoid lying down after eating
4. Ginger tea may help with nausea
5. Keep meals small and frequent

## Insulin

The most powerful blood sugar-lowering medication

## Types of Insulin

Type	Examples	Onset	Duration
Rapid-acting	Humalog, NovoRapid, Apidra	15 min	3-5 hours
Short-acting	Regular/Actrapid	30-60 min	5-8 hours
Intermediate	NPH/Humulin N	1-2 hours	12-18 hours
Long-acting	Lantus, Levemir, Tresiba	1-2 hours	24+ hours
Premixed	Various combinations	Varies	Varies

## Common Side Effects

Side Effect	What to Do
Hypoglycemia	Always carry fast-acting glucose
Weight gain	Work with dietitian; stay active
Injection site lumps	Rotate injection sites
Injection site reactions	Proper technique; rotate sites
Swelling (edema)	Usually temporary when starting

## Serious Side Effects (Call Doctor Immediately)

- ⚠ Severe hypoglycemia (unconsciousness, seizures)
- ⚠ Allergic reactions (rash, swelling, difficulty breathing)
- ⚠ Signs of severe low potassium (muscle cramps, weakness, irregular heartbeat)

## Key Interactions

Factor	Effect
Alcohol	Unpredictable blood sugar effects
Beta-blockers	Mask hypoglycemia symptoms
Steroids	Increase insulin needs
Illness/infection	May need dose adjustment
Exercise	May need to reduce dose or eat more

## Insulin Safety Tips

1. Never skip meals if you've taken insulin
  2. Always check expiry dates
  3. Store properly (refrigerate unopened; room temp once opened)
  4. Rotate injection sites to prevent lipohypertrophy
  5. Keep a glucagon kit accessible for emergencies
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## When to Call Your Doctor

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### Call During Office Hours For:

-  Persistent minor side effects
-  Questions about drug interactions
-  Need for dose adjustments
-  Starting new medications (even OTC)
-  Planning travel or fasting

## Seek Immediate Medical Care For:

- 🚑 Severe hypoglycemia (can't treat yourself)
  - 🚑 Signs of lactic acidosis (rapid breathing, muscle pain, weakness)
  - 🚑 Signs of ketoacidosis (nausea, vomiting, stomach pain, fruity breath)
  - 🚑 Signs of severe allergic reaction
  - 🚑 Severe dehydration
  - 🚑 Chest pain or difficulty breathing
  - 🚑 Confusion or altered consciousness
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## Drug Interaction Quick Reference

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### Medications That May Raise Blood Sugar

Medication Type	Examples
Steroids	Prednisone, dexamethasone
Diuretics	Thiazides
Decongestants	Pseudoephedrine
Some antipsychotics	Olanzapine, clozapine
Beta-blockers	Metoprolol, atenolol

### Medications That May Lower Blood Sugar

Medication Type	Examples
ACE inhibitors	Lisinopril, ramipril
Some antibiotics	Fluoroquinolones
Salicylates	High-dose aspirin
MAO inhibitors	Certain antidepressants

 **Always tell your doctor and pharmacist about ALL medications you take, including herbal supplements and over-the-counter drugs.**

## Safe Medication Practices

### DO:

- Take medications exactly as prescribed
- Keep a list of all your medications
- Set reminders for medication times
- Store medications properly
- Get regular check-ups and blood tests
- Inform all healthcare providers about your diabetes medications

### DON'T:

- Never stop medications without doctor approval
- Don't double up if you miss a dose (ask doctor what to do)
- Don't share medications with others

- Don't take expired medications
  - Don't ignore persistent side effects
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## Questions to Ask Your Doctor

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Before starting any new diabetes medication, ask:

1. What are the most common side effects?
  2. What side effects need immediate attention?
  3. Should I take this with or without food?
  4. What time of day is best for this medication?
  5. Does this interact with my other medications?
  6. What should I do if I miss a dose?
  7. How will we monitor if this is working?
  8. Are there any foods I should avoid?
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## Resources

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**YouTube:** [Health Gheware](#)

- Video guides on managing diabetes medications



**Blog:** [health.gheware.com/blog](http://health.gheware.com/blog)

- In-depth articles on diabetes management



**Community:** Join our WhatsApp community for daily tips

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## Disclaimer

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This guide is for **educational purposes only** and is not intended to replace professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment.

- Always consult your doctor or pharmacist before starting, stopping, or changing any medication
- Individual responses to medications vary
- Not all side effects are listed; refer to medication package inserts for complete information
- If you experience any concerning symptoms, contact your healthcare provider immediately

*Information current as of 2026. Medication guidelines may change.*

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