Insulin taken with diabetes pill ‘would save thousands’

A COMMON diabetes pill taken in combination with insulin jabs could save thousands of lives a year, research suggests.

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Sufferers are more likely to survive by controlling their blood sugar with a double dose of medication, a study of more than 12,000 patients found.

Doctors found death rates and heart attacks were reduced among those who took the combination therapy rather than insulin alone.

Long-acting insulin helps maintain glucose targets while the mealtime diabetes pill either helps the pancreas produce extra insulin or increases the ability to use the insulin the body makes.

Metformin is taken as a pill by people with Type 2 diabetes, the form fuelled by obesity. Insulin jabs are also used to treat the condition.

Professor Craig Currie, of Cardiff University, studied patients who were treated with insulin with or without metformin from 2000 onwards.

He tracked them for three and a half years. He found than when used in conjunction with insulin, metformin had the potential to reduce mortality and heart attacks.

There was no difference in the risk of cancer between people treated with insulin alone or in combination with metformin.

Prof Currie said: “Since 1991, the rate of insulin use in Type 2 increased more than sixfold in the UK. In more recent years, metformin has also been used alongside insulin as a treatment.”

In the past decade the number of people in the UK with diabetes has risen by 65 per cent.

The condition costs the NHS £10billion a year.