



# 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 your blood sugar at your goal level
  - To prevent future health problems that can happen in people with diabetes
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## 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.

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## 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?

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

Another way to know if your treatment is working is to check your blood sugar level yourself. Many people with type 2 diabetes do not need to do this, but some do. It involves using a device called a "blood glucose monitor." If your doctor recommends doing this, he or she will explain how and when to use the device.

## What if my blood sugar level is still higher than normal?

If your blood sugar level is still higher than normal after taking [metformin](#) for 2 to 3 months, your doctor might increase your dose. If you are already taking the highest possible dose, your doctor might suggest adding a second medicine.

## Which second medicine will I take?

There are different medicines your doctor can prescribe. The choice will depend on different things, including your weight, your other health problems, and if you are comfortable giving yourself 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.

If your doctor prescribes insulin, he or she will tell you which form to use and show you how to use it ( [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.

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## 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.

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## 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 where they should be, 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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## More on this topic

[Patient education: The ABCs of diabetes \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Type 2 diabetes \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Hemoglobin A1C tests \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Using insulin \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Low blood sugar in people with diabetes \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Weight loss treatments \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Quitting smoking \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: High blood pressure in adults \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Type 2 diabetes: Insulin treatment \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Type 2 diabetes: Treatment \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Self-monitoring of blood sugar in diabetes \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Type 2 diabetes and diet \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Type 2 diabetes: Alcohol, exercise, and medical care \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

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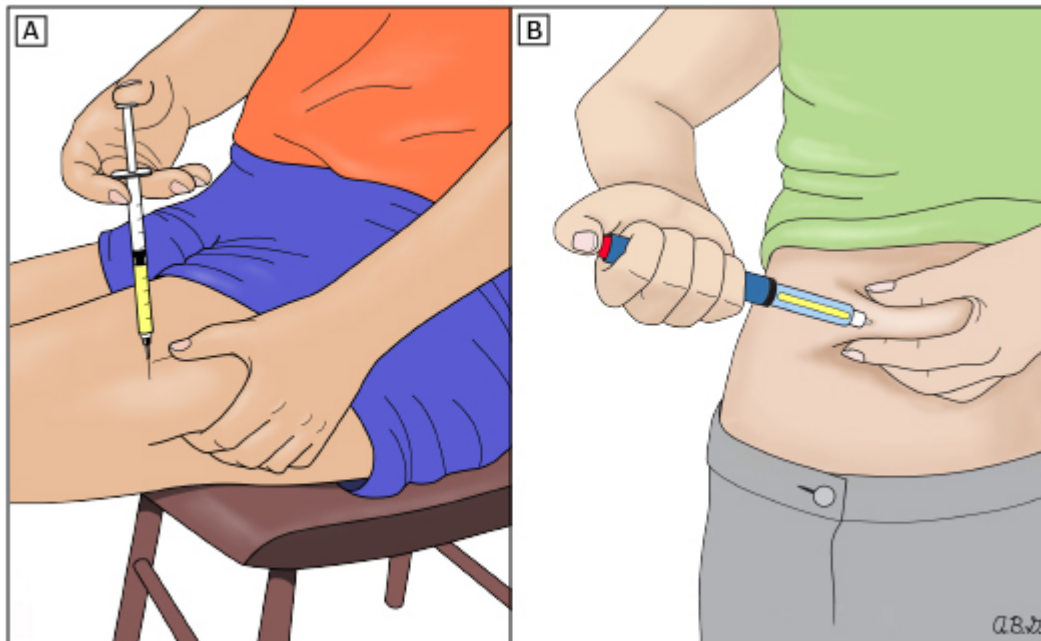
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## GRAPHICS

### How to give an insulin shot

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You can give yourself insulin using a needle and syringe (panel A) or a pen injector (panel B):

1. Pinch up some skin and quickly insert the needle. Keep the skin pinched to avoid having the insulin go into the muscle. Depending upon your body type, you may not need to pinch up a fold of skin.
2. Push the plunger down all the way and count to 5.
3. Let go of the skin and remove the needle. If you can see blood or clear fluid (insulin) where the shot went in, press on the area for 5 to 8 seconds, but do not rub.

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