



Visit your doctor to talk about your health and the medicines you may need. This factsheet will give you information about a type of medicine. You will learn what questions you should ask your doctor about this medicine. Don't be afraid to ask questions. It is very important for your health.

## Treating Type 2 Diabetes

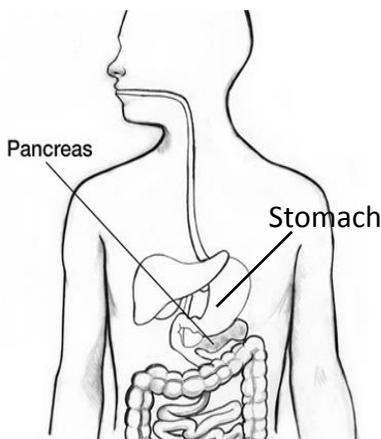
Type 2 diabetes is one of the most serious health problems that affect people in the U.S. People used to think that only adults could get type 2 diabetes, but during the last 20 years, the number of children and adolescents with this disease has gone up.

This report will tell you about type 2 diabetes and the different medicines that can help treat it.



## What is diabetes?

Diabetes is when the sugar in your blood is too high. This is what happens:



National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, National Institutes of Health

We eat food, like pasta, bread, vegetables, and fruits to get energy. These types of foods are called carbohydrates.

Then, the **stomach** breaks down the carbohydrates into very little parts of sugar or glucose. Glucose (sugar) then goes into your bloodstream and the blood takes it to the cells all over the body.

To get the glucose into the cells, your **pancreas** produces a hormone called insulin. If the pancreas does not produce insulin at all, or if the body's cells cannot use the insulin as they should, then glucose builds up in the blood and the body cannot get the energy it needs.

There are two types of diabetes: Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes. **Type 1 diabetes** is when the pancreas stops producing insulin.

**Type 2 diabetes** is when the pancreas produces enough insulin, but the body's cells cannot use the insulin as they should. Because of that, the glucose builds up in the blood and, over the years, it may hurt your arteries, veins, nerves, heart, eyes, liver, and kidneys.

Type 2 diabetes increases your chances of developing and dying from other diseases, like heart disease, and increases your risk for having a stroke. Type 2 diabetes affects more people, including children and teenagers, than type 1 diabetes.



## How do I know if I have type 2 diabetes?

If you have two or more of the following symptoms, even for a few days, you may have type 2 diabetes and you need to see the doctor right away.

- You have wounds or sores that are not healing as fast as usual.
- You are feeling very tired.
- You are feeling thirsty and hungry all the time.
- Your hands and feet are numb or tingling.
- You are urinating very frequently.
- Your vision is blurry.

At the beginning, a person with type 2 diabetes may not feel any of these symptoms. Over time, he or she will begin to feel more symptoms, but they can be very mild or they can come and go.



## So, can I have type 2 diabetes and not notice it for years?

Yes. This is why it is so important to know if you are at a higher risk of getting diabetes, and to get your blood tested regularly. If you belong to one of the following groups and you have never checked your blood sugar levels, visit your doctor to have your blood checked as soon as possible.

- You have a parent or brother or sister with diabetes.
- You are a Black-American, Hispanic-American, Asian-American, Native American, Pacific Islander, or Alaskan Native.
- You are 65 years old or older.
- You are overweight or obese.
- You are a woman who had diabetes during your pregnancy, or your baby weighed more than 9 pounds at birth.



## How do doctors treat diabetes?

If you are diagnosed with diabetes, doctors may first recommend that you make some changes in your lifestyle, like losing weight, eating a special diet, exercising, and quitting smoking to get your blood sugar under control. When these changes are not enough, then doctors may also use some diabetes medicines. If diet, exercise, and diabetes pills do not work, then doctors may use insulin and other types of medicines given by injection.



## Do diabetes pills have side effects?

Yes. Some examples of side effects are:

- **For a lot of people:** You may get hypoglycemia. This means that your blood sugar is too low and it makes you feel dizzy, hungry, sweaty, and shaky. You may also gain weight, and have nausea, stomach aches, vomiting, and diarrhea. Your legs and ankles can also get swollen. Your cholesterol level can go up.
- **For only some people:** You may get anemia. This means the amount of your red blood cells is low. You may also develop a condition called congestive heart failure. This means that your heart can no longer pump enough blood to the rest of your body. You may also have an allergic reaction.
- **For very few people:** You may develop problems with your eyes, your liver, and blood.

If you feel any of these side effects when taking a diabetes pill, talk to your doctor right away.



## Which diabetes pills should I take?

*Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* evaluated the medicines to treat diabetes by comparing how well they work, how safe they are, and their cost. *Consumer Reports* recommends starting with one of the following generic medicines:



In the United States, “generic” medicines are just as good as brand-name medicines. They are very safe and work just like the brand-name medicine, and they cost a lot less money. Ask your doctor if you can get a generic medicine instead of a brand-name medicine.

- **Metformin and metformin sustained-release** – can be taken alone or taken with **glipizide** or **glimepiride**.
- **Glipizide and glipizide sustained-release** – can be taken alone or taken with **metformin**.
- **Glimepiride** – can be taken alone or taken with **metformin**.

Some of these generic medicines may cost you as little as \$4 for a month’s supply if you use a discount generic drug program run by stores like Sam’s Club, Target, or Walmart. You may also be able to get a 3-month supply for \$10 through these programs. To get these prices, you do not need prescription drug insurance coverage.

You should also know:

- Taking more than one diabetes medicine is often necessary to control the glucose (sugar) in your blood.
- Newer medicines are more expensive and are not always better or safer than the older ones.

Be very careful with two newer medicines called *Avandia* and *Actos*. Both of these pills can raise your chances of heart failure, and *Avandia* can increase your risk for heart attack and stroke. Both of these medicines have also been linked to a slight chance of broken bones in women. *Actos* also raises your risk of bladder cancer if you take it for a year or longer. You should **ONLY** use *Actos* if all other medicines mentioned above do not work for you. If you are currently taking *Actos*, ask your doctor if you really need it, and ask if you can switch to *metformin*. For many people, *metformin* is the most effective and among the safest of all diabetes pills.

**To learn more about this topic go to:**

<http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/2012/12/treating-type-2-diabetes/index.htm>



### How to Get the Best Price for Your Medicines

- **Ask for a generic:** Tell your pharmacist you want a generic medicine instead of the brand-name. You will pay less for a generic. Not all brand-name medicines have a generic, but many do.
- **Compare prices:** Call or visit three different pharmacies. Give them the name of the medicine and ask how much it costs. Ask if they have a drug discount program that can help you pay less for your medicine. Buy your medicine from the pharmacy that gives you the cheapest price.
- **Sign up for patient assistance programs:** Most companies that make medicines have programs that help people that don't have a lot of money and do not have insurance to get brand-name medicines for free or at a low cost. The Partnership for Prescription Assistance can help you find a program: [www.pparx.org](http://www.pparx.org) or 1-888-477-2669.

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