

Type 2 diabetes in adults: management

Information for the public

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Type 2 diabetes: the care you should expect

Type 2 diabetes causes people to have too much sugar (glucose) in their blood. It is caused when the body cannot use a hormone called insulin as well as it should.

Type 2 diabetes puts people at risk of long-term problems with their eyes, feet, heart, kidneys and nerves. It is a lifelong condition that can affect everyday life. People with type 2 diabetes:

- may need to change their diet and make other lifestyle changes
- usually need to take medicines to control their blood sugar
- will need to get regular checkups.

We want this guideline to make a difference to people with type 2 diabetes by making

sure:

- they get personalised advice on healthy eating from experts (such as dietitians)
- healthcare professionals involve them in agreeing an average blood sugar target (called a HbA1c level) – the target is normally 48 mmol/mol (or 6.5%), but for some people a different target can be better
- their care team discuss the different diabetes medicines with them, so they can jointly agree which to take (some people will need to take more than one medicine)
- they can get a type of medicine called an SGLT2 inhibitor if they have cardiovascular disease or problems with their kidneys
- people who are taking insulin can get a flash monitoring system if it would help them manage their diabetes – for example if they are having lots of hypos, or their hypos are severe (a hypo is when blood sugar is too low, and it can cause dizziness and fainting)
- they are encouraged to see a dentist regularly, to get checked for gum disease.

Making decisions together

Decisions about treatment and care are best when they are made together. Your [health and care] professionals should give you clear information, talk with you about your options and listen carefully to your views and concerns.

To help you make decisions, think about:

- What matters most to you – what do you want to get out of any treatment or care?
- What are you most worried about – are there risks or downsides to the treatment that worry you more than others?
- How will the treatment affect your day to day life?
- What happens if you don't want to have treatment?

If you need more support to understand the information you are given, tell your healthcare professional.

Read more about [making decisions about your care](#).

Your diabetes care team

Most appointments for people with type 2 diabetes will be with a doctor or nurse at your GP surgery or health centre. You may also be referred to a diabetes clinic (usually at a hospital).

What your diabetes care team will do

You will need to see your GP or nurse regularly, and they will help and support you to manage your diabetes.

You will also have a thorough check-up every year – your 'annual review'. This involves several checks that may happen at different times and in different places.

Your diabetes care team will work with you to agree a plan for your care that suits your needs and circumstances. They will ask about:

- your medical history and general health
- if you have any disabilities (for example if you have any sight problems)
- if you take any medicines regularly
- your lifestyle and home life
- any family history of diabetes or heart problems.

They should ask about your own needs and about any cultural preferences because this may affect the type of treatment you choose.

Your diabetes care team will work closely with you, and you can ask for help or advice at any time. What the team does will depend on how long you have had diabetes for and how well managed it is, but should include:

- giving you advice and support about type 2 diabetes, including details about support groups
- offering you a course that helps you understand more about type 2 diabetes and what you can do to manage it

- [diet and lifestyle advice](#)
- checking your [blood pressure](#) at least once a year
- checking your [blood glucose](#)
- [testing your HbA1c levels](#) (which reflect your average blood glucose level over the past 2 to 3 months) at least every 3 to 6 months, and agreeing targets with you
- discussing [medicines to control your blood glucose](#)
- explaining about insulin and showing you how to inject insulin if you need it
- explaining about the symptoms, risks and treatment of [hypos](#)
- looking at whether you have [cardiovascular disease](#) and your risk of getting it in future
- making sure you have regular [eye screening](#)
- making sure you have regular [foot checks](#) (as part of your annual review)
- encouraging you to see a dentist regularly, so they can check for [gum disease](#)
- checking for other [long-term complications](#) that can be caused by type 2 diabetes, such as problems with your kidneys or nerves.

If it is possible that you could get pregnant, you should be given information about contraception and family planning. See [NICE's guideline and information for the public on diabetes in pregnancy](#).

Some treatments or care described in this information may not be suitable for you. If you think that your treatment does not match this advice, talk to your doctor or nurse.

Questions to ask about your care

- Please tell me more about living with type 2 diabetes
- How often will I need to see the doctor or nurse?
- Why would I need to go to the diabetes clinic at a hospital?
- What sorts of health problems are more common in people with type 2 diabetes? What can I do to help prevent these?
- Who should I contact if I have any questions or am worried about my diabetes?
- Can you give me written information? What websites are helpful?
- Can you point me towards local or national support groups?

Learning more about type 2 diabetes

By understanding your type 2 diabetes better, you will be more able to manage it successfully and reduce the risks of long-term complications. Learning about your diabetes and how to look after yourself is an essential part of diabetes care.

At around the time you are diagnosed, your doctor or nurse should provide you with information about type 2 diabetes. At your annual review they should go over this information again with you, and talk with you about your needs.

You should be offered a course to help you improve your understanding of type 2 diabetes and how to manage it in your everyday life.

The course is usually done in a group because this lets people share their experiences. But if you do not feel comfortable with that you may be able to have training on your own.

Diet and lifestyle

There is a lot you can do to keep your diabetes under control and reduce your risk of other complications developing.

Lifestyle

If you have type 2 diabetes, having a healthy diet and lifestyle is one of the most important things you can do to manage your diabetes and minimise your risk of developing complications.

A healthy lifestyle involves being active, losing weight if you are overweight, getting enough exercise, having a healthy diet, not smoking and controlling your alcohol intake if you drink alcohol. Your doctor or nurse should give you more information about a healthy lifestyle and what you can do to help keep type 2 diabetes under control (for example, having a healthy diet, taking more exercise and losing weight).

Diet

Having a healthy diet is an important part of living with type 2 diabetes. Eating healthily and losing weight if you are overweight will help you to manage your diabetes better.

An expert such as a dietitian should give you advice about your diet. This should be designed to suit your lifestyle, culture, beliefs and preferences.

If you are overweight, you will be encouraged to lose weight and agree on a target weight loss. Your starting weight-loss target should be to lose 5% to 10% of your weight. Any weight loss will help, although the nearer you get to a healthy body weight, the better it will be for your long-term health.

Advice about your diet should also cover the best times to eat, how much carbohydrate per meal you should eat and, if you drink alcohol, how much alcohol to drink.

General healthy eating is also important, and you should:

- eat carbohydrate from fruit, vegetables, whole grains and pulses
- eat low-fat dairy products and oily fish
- limit the amount of food that you eat that contains saturated fats and trans fatty acids.

There's no need to buy food sold specifically for people with diabetes because this tends to be expensive and is not necessarily any better for you. You can still enjoy some foods containing sugar as long as they form part of an overall healthy and balanced diet and

lifestyle.

See [NICE guidelines and information for the public on topics relating to diet and lifestyle](#).

Questions to ask about diet and lifestyle

- Please explain more about how what I eat and drink affects my diabetes
- What sorts of foods should I eat?
- Do I have to avoid sugary foods?
- Can I eat carbohydrates?
- What are the effects of alcohol on my diabetes?
- How will losing weight help?
- What sorts of exercise are best? Are there any types of exercise I shouldn't do?
- Where can I get advice and support about giving up smoking?
- Are there any support groups in my local area?
- What could happen if I do not change my lifestyle?
- What information and support is available to help me make changes to my lifestyle?

High blood pressure

Keeping your blood pressure as normal as possible is an important part of treatment for type 2 diabetes because this reduces your risk of [cardiovascular disease](#).

See [NICE's guideline and information for the public on hypertension](#), which is the medical name for high blood pressure.

Questions to ask about treatment for high blood pressure

- Why is it important to keep my blood pressure as normal as possible?
- What blood pressure levels should I aim for?
- How often will my blood pressure be tested?
- What can I do to lower my blood pressure? Will taking exercise help?
- What other lifestyle changes should I make to help reduce my blood pressure?
- Why are you offering this medicine for blood pressure? How will it help?
- What are the side effects of these medicines? What should I do if I get any side effects?

Cardiovascular disease

People with type 2 diabetes are more likely to have problems with their heart or blood vessels ([cardiovascular disease](#)). Your doctor or nurse should give you [diet and lifestyle advice](#) about how to reduce your risk of getting cardiovascular disease.

At your annual review your doctor or nurse should look out for things that may increase your risk of cardiovascular disease. If you smoke you should be given advice about quitting.

See [NICE's guideline and information for the public on cardiovascular disease](#).

Questions to ask about cardiovascular disease

- Why am I at risk of cardiovascular disease?
- What can I do to reduce my risk?
- What lifestyle changes should I make?
- How will I know if I've got cardiovascular disease?
- How important is my family history?

Blood glucose and target levels

Having high blood glucose makes you more likely to get other health problems, so keeping your blood glucose levels as close to normal as possible is very important. Your doctor or nurse will help you with this.

Having your blood glucose checked: HbA1c

The HbA1c blood test reflects your average blood glucose level over the past 2 to 3 months. Keeping your HbA1c levels as close to normal as possible is an important part of managing diabetes. Your doctor or nurse should discuss this with you, and together you should agree a personal HbA1c target to aim for. If you find that reaching or staying at the target level is affecting your day-to-day life and making things worse, you should discuss this with the doctor or nurse.

Your HbA1c should be tested every 3 to 6 months. It might be done more often if your blood glucose levels are changing quickly. When your HbA1c level is stable, you should then have an HbA1c blood test every 6 months.

The HbA1c result is given in a unit of measurement that is written as 'mmol/mol'. HbA1c used to be given as a percentage (%), so you may still see this.

The HbA1c target for most people with type 2 diabetes is 48 mmol/mol (or 6.5%), but your doctor might suggest a different target for you. You should be offered support, diet and

lifestyle advice, and medicine if you need it, to help you reach and stay at your HbA1c target.

Questions to ask about HbA1c

- What does HbA1c show about my blood glucose?
- How, where and how often will it be tested?
- What HbA1c target should I aim for?
- What if I'm having problems meeting my target?

Testing your own blood glucose

Usually, blood glucose testing is done by your doctor or nurse. But some people (for example people using insulin) might be able to do this at home with a [continuous glucose monitor](#) (CGM) or finger prick home-testing kit. If your doctor or nurse thinks CGM or finger prick testing would be suitable for you:

- they will give you training and support so you know what to do
- they will assess your blood glucose testing skills and needs regularly, as part of the reviews of your diabetes care plan.

Not everyone needs to monitor their blood glucose at home. You should only do this if your doctor or nurse advises it.

Medicines to control blood glucose

Most people with type 2 diabetes need medicines to help control their blood glucose. If you need to take medicine – or several medicines – to control your blood glucose, your doctor or nurse should discuss the different options so you can decide together which is best for you. Most people need more than 1 medicine for their diabetes and in time may also need insulin (which needs to be injected).

If your blood glucose level is very high

If your blood glucose level is high, the medical name for this is [hyperglycaemia](#). The symptoms of hyperglycaemia include feeling very thirsty, needing to pass urine a lot and feeling more tired than usual. If your blood glucose level is too high and you notice any or all of these symptoms, you'll be offered insulin or a medicine called a [sulfonylurea](#) to lower your blood glucose level.

When your blood glucose is under control your doctor will review your treatment.

Medicine to control blood glucose

There are several different types of medicines that can be used to treat type 2 diabetes. Some medicines are used on their own and some can be used together with others. The medicine (or medicines) you are offered will depend on your diabetes, what diabetes medicines you have had before, any other health issues you have and your preferences.

Most people with type 2 diabetes who need medicine start off taking a medicine called [metformin](#). This isn't suitable for everyone so your doctor will discuss other options with you if needed.

You may also be offered a type of medicine called an SGLT2 inhibitor, to control your blood glucose. SGLT2 inhibitors are helpful for people with type 2 diabetes who have [cardiovascular disease](#), or who are at high risk of developing it. Your doctor should work out your individual risk of cardiovascular disease and use this to discuss the potential benefits of an SGLT2 inhibitor with you. If an SGLT2 inhibitor could help you, you might take it on its own or with metformin.

If this first medicine (or combination of medicines) doesn't help or your diabetes is getting worse over time, you may need to add in another type of medicine as well as the ones you are already taking. If this still doesn't help or your diabetes is getting worse, you may be offered a third medicine. Your doctor may suggest you start on insulin if you are already taking 3 medicines, or if they think insulin would be better for you than a third medicine.

Your doctor or nurse will review your HbA1c target with you if you need more than 1 medicine to control your blood glucose.

When your doctor is discussing different types of medicines with you, they should explain

all the possible benefits and risks, including any possible side effects, so you can decide together what will suit you best. They should also review your medicines after you start taking them, to make sure they are working and are still right for your circumstances.

Remember – it's very important to take the medicine (or medicines) as your doctor or nurse prescribes (the correct dose and at the correct time), to help keep your diabetes under control.

Questions to ask about medicines

- Why have you decided to offer this medicine?
- What are the pros and cons of having this medicine?
- How should I take the medicine?
- How long will it take to have an effect?
- Is it likely to cause hypoglycaemia?
- How will the medicine help me? What effect will it have on my symptoms and everyday life? What sort of improvements might I expect?
- Are there any risks or side effects associated with this medicine?
- What if the medicine doesn't help?
- How long will I need the medicine for?
- What other medicine options are there?

Insulin for controlling blood glucose

As type 2 diabetes progresses over time, the blood sugar levels naturally tend to rise. This means many people with type 2 diabetes will need insulin at some point in order to feel better, simply because the tablets are no longer strong enough.

Insulin cannot be taken as a tablet and has to be injected.

There are several different types of insulin treatment, which vary in both the insulins used and the number of injections. If you have type 2 diabetes and need insulin, you should usually be offered treatment with a 'long-acting' insulin that is injected once or twice a day. The insulin used will depend on which suits you best – your diabetes care team will talk with you about this.

If you have been taking metformin without any problems you should continue to take this, as well as insulin.

Injecting insulin

Insulin is commonly injected using a device called an 'insulin pen'. Your diabetes care team should help you choose the type of device and needles that suit you, and offer you different needles to try if your skin gets sore or irritated.

Your skin can get lumpy if you keep injecting in the same place, so you should use different areas of the body (stomach, thighs, bottom, upper arms) and different spots in these areas. Your diabetes care team will check your skin at your annual review, and more often if needed.

You should be given a special secure container (called a 'sharps bin') for used needles, lancets (from finger pricking) and any other sharps. You should also be told how to get rid of these containers when they are full and how to get new ones.

Information and support

If you start using insulin, you should be given:

- education about how to inject the insulin, how insulin works and how it affects the body
- advice about eating and drinking
- advice about driving
- information about hypoglycaemia, how best to avoid it and what to do if it happens

- advice about how to check your blood glucose levels, and what the results mean – for example, you should have information on what to do if there are unexpected changes in your blood glucose levels
- support (on the phone and face-to-face) from a member of the diabetes care team.

Questions to ask about insulin

- Why do I need to inject insulin?
- How often do I need to inject insulin? What are the best times to do this?
- Where should I inject?
- Please explain about the differences between the different insulins.
- What different types of insulin device and needles are available?

Long-term complications

Having type 2 diabetes means that you are more likely to get a number of other health problems. You can help to prevent or delay these by keeping your blood glucose levels, blood pressure and cholesterol levels as normal as possible.

Eye damage

Type 2 diabetes means you are more likely to have an eye problem called [retinopathy](#).

Your diabetes care team should talk with you about retinopathy, and explain the problems you might have if your eyes are affected. It is important to have regular eye screening checks for retinopathy. These are different from normal sight tests and specifically look for early signs of damage caused by diabetes.

Your eyes should be checked at or around the time you are diagnosed with type 2 diabetes and, if everything seems fine, at least once a year from then on. If there are signs that damage may be developing, you will be offered another check or may be referred to an eye specialist at a hospital.

Gum disease

Type 2 diabetes means you are more likely to have gum disease (also called periodontitis).

It is important to have regular dental checks for gum disease. Your dentist can do this as part of your normal dental appointments, and they will tell you how often you need to come in.

If you do get gum disease, your dentist should offer regular appointments to treat it. Treating gum disease can also make it easier to manage your blood glucose, and reduce your risk of [hyperglycaemia](#).

Nerve problems

Nerve damage and pain

Type 2 diabetes means you are more likely to get nerve damage, or [neuropathy](#). Neuropathy can cause pain – this is called neuropathic pain. See [NICE's guidelines and information for the public on medicines for neuropathic pain](#).

Gastroparesis

Gastroparesis is a type of nerve problem that affects the stomach. It can make you feel full and bloated even after eating a small amount of food, and can cause vomiting.

Your doctor may also offer you medicines to help with vomiting – if so, they should explain about the possible risks and benefits of taking these medicines.

If these treatments do not help or aren't suitable for you, you may be referred to a specialist.

At the time of publication, some medicines for treating gastroparesis may be recommended for [off-label use](#) in this guideline. Your doctor should tell you this and explain what it means for you.

Questions to ask about gastroparesis

- What causes gastroparesis?
- What can I do to reduce or stop vomiting?
- What medicines can I try? How will they help?
- What are the side effects of these medicines? What should I do if I get any side effects?

Erection problems

Erection problems (also called erectile dysfunction) are quite common in men with type 2 diabetes. If you wish, your doctor or nurse should talk to you about this at your annual review. If you would like treatment you should be given medicine that can help, if this is suitable for you. If this doesn't work, your doctor can refer you to a specialist clinic.

Other nerve-related problems

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have diarrhoea (particularly at night) or problems emptying your bladder fully. Also tell them if you are worried about other symptoms such as sweating a lot, or if you start to have hypos without the usual warning signs. These symptoms may be caused by nerve problems, and you might need further tests and treatment.

Foot problems

Type 2 diabetes increases your chances of having foot problems. See [NICE's guideline and information for the public on diabetic foot problems](#).

Kidney disease

Having type 2 diabetes means you are more likely to get kidney disease – this is called nephropathy. If tests show that your kidneys are not working as they should, you may be

offered 1 or more medicines to stop or delay any kidney damage from getting worse. These may include SGLT2 inhibitors, which are helpful for people with chronic kidney disease. See [NICE's guideline on chronic kidney disease](#).

Terms explained

Cardiovascular disease

A general term for disease of the heart and blood vessels. It is usually caused by a narrowing of the blood vessels that mean blood cannot flow to the heart, brain, feet or other parts of the body properly. Heart disease and stroke are common forms of severe cardiovascular disease.

Continuous glucose monitoring

This includes real-time continuous glucose monitoring (rtCGM) and intermittent-scanning continuous blood glucose monitor (isCGM, also called 'flash'). You will usually be offered isCGM. Both types of continuous glucose monitor work with a sensor that you wear on your skin, and a display monitor or smartphone that shows your blood glucose level. rtCGM devices automatically send regular readings to the monitor or smart phone. You need to scan isCGM devices yourself.

HbA1c test

A blood test that reflects the average blood glucose level over the previous 2 to 3 months. The result is usually given in mmol/mol. (It used to be given as a percentage.) In people without diabetes, it is usually below 42 mmol/mol (or 6%).

Hyperglycaemia

A higher than normal level of glucose in the blood. Symptoms include feeling thirsty and hungry, and increased urination. Over time, hyperglycaemia also increases the risk of eye, gum, nerve, kidney and cardiovascular disease.

Hypo (hypoglycaemia)

A lower than normal level of glucose in the blood – usually less than 3.5 mmol/litre. The symptoms of a hypo include feeling dizzy (or even losing consciousness), feeling tired, feeling hungry, shaking and sweating. It is important to recognise the warning signs of a hypo.

Metformin

A medicine (tablet) that lowers blood glucose levels in people with type 2 diabetes through improving the action of insulin.

Nephropathy

Another name for kidney disease. Type 2 diabetes can cause the small blood vessels in the kidneys to be damaged so that they stop working properly. The earliest sign is having a protein called albumin in the urine.

Neuropathy

Damage or disease that affects the nerves. Type 2 diabetes can cause neuropathy as a result of damage to the small blood vessels that supply nerves. Because nerves affect all parts of the body, neuropathy can have a number of effects.

Off-label use

In the UK, medicines are licensed to show that they work well enough and are safe enough to be used for specific conditions and groups of people. Some medicines can also be helpful for conditions or people they do not have a licence for. This is called off-label use. Off-label use might also mean the medicine is taken at a different dose or in a different way to the licence, such as using a cream or taking a tablet. There is more [information about licensing medicines on the NHS website](#).

Retinopathy

An eye condition where the retina (the seeing part of the eye) is damaged. Type 2

diabetes can cause the small blood vessels around the retina to become blocked or leaky, or grow in the wrong way, so that light cannot pass through properly.

Sulfonylureas

Diabetes medicines that help the body to make insulin.

Where can I find out more?

There is more [information about type 2 diabetes on the NHS website](#).

The organisations below can give you more advice and support.

- [Diabetes UK](#), 0345 123 2399
- [Diabetes Research and Wellness Foundation](#), 02392 637 808
- [Weight Concern](#)

To share an experience of care you have received, contact your local [Healthwatch](#).

NICE is not responsible for the content of these websites.

Read more about [making decisions about your care](#).

You may also like to read [NICE's information for the public on patient experience in adult NHS services](#). This sets out what adults should be able to expect when they use the NHS. We also have more information on the NICE website about using health and social care services.

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Accreditation

