

Type 2 diabetes and worries about insulin injections

It's common for people with Type 2 diabetes to need to intensify their treatment, which can mean moving on to insulin.

But many people with Type 2 diabetes have concerns or feel anxious about starting insulin. If you feel this way, you are not alone. There are many things you can do to adjust to a new way of managing your diabetes.

“In my mind it sort of felt that, if I went on insulin, I wasn't doing well enough with my diet and exercise, even though I was exhausting myself.”

Chris, 67, person with Type 2 diabetes



Concerns about insulin

People use insulin because it can make a positive difference to how they manage their diabetes. Sometimes, the thought of needing to use insulin can leave people feeling:

- worried or nervous about needles and the pain of injections, or the possibility of having hypos (low blood glucose)
- embarrassed about what others might think
- angry about having to take insulin
- like they've failed – some may feel they wouldn't need insulin if they had taken better care of their diabetes before.

Needing insulin is not your fault and you have not failed in any way. Concerns are natural but they become a serious problem when they start to impact on daily life or how you manage your diabetes, for example:

- delaying going on to insulin, skipping doses of insulin or stopping insulin altogether
- missing medical appointments to avoid talking about insulin
- blaming yourself or others for needing to start insulin.

If you're worried about starting insulin, talk with your healthcare professional. They will assess the problem and help you work out strategies to help you feel less worried.

What you can do

Whether you're worried about starting insulin or not, it's important to look after your emotional wellbeing.

Some of the following things may work for you – others may not, and that's okay. They may give you ideas about other things you could try.

Be informed

Insulin has many benefits. The first step is to be informed about what these are. Understanding the benefits of insulin treatment can help you manage these feelings (see box below). Take your time and gather information at your own pace.

A good place to start is to find out more about insulin from our website at www.diabetes.org.uk/insulin

Identify your thoughts and feelings

Recognising what you think and feel about insulin is an important step. Ask yourself:

- Is this thought or feeling helpful?
- What is a more helpful way of thinking about the situation?

Talk with people you trust about your concerns – this could be your family, friends or your diabetes healthcare team. Talking through some of your feelings can be a good way of making a decision about starting insulin.

Top 5 benefits of using insulin

1. Insulin is a powerful treatment for managing blood glucose levels (blood sugars).
2. Keeping blood sugar levels in your target range reduces your risk of complications, like serious problems with your eyes and feet.
3. Keeping blood sugar levels in target range also makes you feel better and have more energy to live your life as you want.
4. Taking insulin may mean you can stop taking – or reduce the dose of – some of your tablets (ask your doctor about this).
5. Insulin comes in many different forms – your doctor can help you choose one to fit your lifestyle.

Ask questions

It's okay if you don't know everything about insulin. Some people find that writing a list of questions and concerns is a useful way of processing some of their feelings.

Bring this list along to your next diabetes appointment, so you don't forget the questions or concerns you want to talk over with your diabetes team.

Remember, there are no silly questions or concerns – they are all valid. Your healthcare professional will appreciate anything you mention, as it will help them offer you the best support.

Ask yourself what's important

Understanding what you value is an important step towards making a decision about insulin treatment.

- Write down or think about what is important to you and the way you want to live your life.
- Then ask yourself, 'What can I do to achieve this?'

When you're ready, have this discussion with your healthcare team.

Make a list

Sometimes it can help to write down the pros and cons (advantages and disadvantages) when you need to make a tough decision. If you and your doctor have talked about insulin and you're feeling unsure about it, write down a list of reasons to take insulin and a list of reasons not to take insulin. Review your options carefully and discuss them with your healthcare professional.

Get connected

It may help to talk with others who understand what it's like to live with diabetes. It can be reassuring to know that other people face similar challenges and to share ideas about how to cope with them. Whether you could join a support group or find it easier to chat to others online, [we can help](#).

Ask your healthcare professional for our leaflet on peer support, or contact us for more information.

Talk with a professional

We've given you some ideas about how to manage any concerns you may have about insulin. But they can't replace professional help. It's always a good idea to talk about your worries with your healthcare team.

Who can help?

Your diabetes healthcare professionals

Your diabetes healthcare team are there to help you with all aspects of your diabetes, including how you feel about insulin. If you feel comfortable, share your feelings with them – they will give you non-judgmental support and advice. You may want to talk with your:

- general practitioner (GP)
- diabetologist (consultant)
- diabetes specialist nurse
- practice nurse
- dietitian.

Bring this leaflet along to your consultation to help get the conversation started. You will probably feel relieved after sharing your feelings, and it will help your health professional to understand how you are feeling.

Together, you can make plans to reduce your concerns. For example, your GP can inform you about what you should expect from insulin so that it feels less overwhelming.

Ask them about structured diabetes education sessions in your area. Learning more about diabetes and insulin can help with overcoming fears.

Your pharmacist

Have a conversation with your pharmacist. They can provide you with information and counselling about using insulin; what the different types of insulin are, and when and how to inject. You can ask them about insulin even if your doctor has not prescribed it yet.

Psychological specialist

You might also like to talk with a psychological specialist. They will help you find ways to cope and adjust to life with diabetes.

You can find help from your local Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) team. Ask your diabetes team to refer you, or contact them directly by searching online for 'IAPT' and your local area name.

“I know eventually I probably will have to go on to insulin and that’s going to be an absolute pain, but then it’s going to be an absolute pain if I don’t do it. So that’s going to happen, it’s just general ageing, general deterioration.”

Caroline, 58, person with Type 2 diabetes

More information and support

How we help

Diabetes UK

We’re fighting for a world where diabetes can do no harm. And as the UK’s leading diabetes charity, it’s our job to tackle the diabetes crisis. We provide information, advice and support to people with all types of diabetes so they can learn to live well with their condition.

And we bring people together so they can learn from each other and get to grips with diabetes. Visit our website www.diabetes.org.uk/insulin

Our helpline is managed by trained counsellors there to listen, give support and answer questions. Call **0345 123 2399**

You can meet other people with diabetes at one of our local support groups.

Visit www.diabetes.org.uk/support-groups

Or chat to others online in our support forum at www.diabetes.org.uk/forum

And if you’re on social media, join our online community on Facebook or follow us at **@DiabetesUK** on Twitter.

www.diabetes.org.uk

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