



FACT SHEET:

Concerns about starting insulin (for people with type 2 diabetes)

It is common for people with type 2 diabetes to need a combination of medicines for treatment. Insulin is one of these medicines and is effective for reducing high blood glucose levels. Even so, 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 this 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

- fearful of hypoglycaemia (also known as hypo or low blood glucose level)
- embarrassed about what others might think
- angry about having to take insulin
- like they have ‘failed’ (e.g. that they would not have needed 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. Having concerns is natural. However, concerns become a serious problem when they start to affect your daily life or diabetes management. For example if you are:

- delaying starting insulin, skipping doses or stopping insulin altogether

Concerns about insulin

People take insulin because it can make a positive difference to their diabetes management. However, sometimes the thought of needing to take insulin can leave people feeling:

- worried or nervous about needles and the pain of injections

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- missing medical appointments to avoid talking about insulin
- blaming yourself or others for needing to start insulin.

If starting insulin is a concern for you, talk with your diabetes health professional. They will assess the problem and help you work out strategies for reducing your concerns.

What you can do

Whether or not you currently have concerns about insulin, it is important to look after your emotional wellbeing.

Some of the following strategies may work for you; others may not, and that is okay. They may give you ideas about other things you could try.

Be informed

Insulin has many benefits (see box). The first step is to inform yourself about what these are. Understanding the benefits of insulin treatment will improve your chances of managing your diabetes well. Take your time and gather information at your own pace.

A good place to start is by contacting the diabetes organisation in your state or territory. If you are unsure about who to contact, call the **NDSS Helpline 1800 637 700** and they can direct you.

Take care when searching the internet for medical advice. Make sure you consult reliable sources (e.g., professional organisations).

Identify your thoughts and feelings

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

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

Talk with people you trust about your concerns (e.g., family, friends, or your diabetes health professional). Talking through some of your feelings can help you decide on starting insulin.

Ask questions

It is okay if you do not have all the answers about insulin therapy. Sometimes, 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 that you do not forget the questions or concerns you want to talk over with your health professional.
- Remember, there are no silly questions or concerns – they are all valid. Your health professional will appreciate anything you mention, as it will help them to offer you the best possible support.

Top 5 reasons to take insulin

1. Insulin is a powerful and effective treatment for managing blood glucose levels.
2. Taking insulin may mean you can stop taking – or reduce the dose of – some of your tablets (ask your doctor about this).
3. Insulin can improve your long-term health. Keeping blood glucose levels within your target range* reduces your risk of long-term diabetes-related complications.
4. Insulin will make you feel better. Keeping blood glucose levels within your target range* will give you more energy to live your life as you want.
5. Insulin comes in fast, intermediate, and long-acting forms. Your doctor can help you choose a regimen to fit your lifestyle.

* Talk with your health professional about what is the right target range for you.

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Ask yourself what is important

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

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

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 your doctor has talked with you about insulin and you are unsure about it, write down a list of reasons to take or not to take insulin. Review your options carefully and discuss them with your diabetes health professional.

Get connected

It may help to talk with others who understand what it is 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.

Join a peer support group or online community. Go to peersupport.ndss.com.au to find out more.

Talk with a professional

The strategies above may give you some ideas about how to manage any concerns you may have about insulin, but they cannot replace professional help. It is always a good idea to talk about your concerns with your diabetes health professional.

Who can help?

Your diabetes health professionals

Your diabetes health professionals are there to help you with all aspects of your diabetes, including how you feel about insulin. Share your feelings with them if you are comfortable to do so; they will give you non-judgmental support and advice.



You may want to talk with your:

- general practitioner (GP)
- endocrinologist
- diabetes educator
- diabetes nurse practitioner
- dietitian.

Take this fact sheet to your appointment 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 doctor can inform you about what you should expect from insulin so that it feels less overwhelming.

- You might like to attend a structured diabetes education session. Learning more about diabetes and insulin can help with overcoming fears.
- There may be group education sessions in your area.
- Ask your health professional or contact the diabetes organisation in your state/territory for more information.

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Your pharmacist

Talk to 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.

A psychologist

You might like to talk with a psychologist. They will help you find ways to cope with your concerns about using insulin.

Ask your diabetes health professional if they know a psychologist in your area who is familiar with diabetes.

- To find a psychologist near you, go to the Australian Psychological Society website at psychology.org.au.

Your GP can tell you if you are eligible for a Mental Health Treatment Plan to reduce the costs of seeing a psychologist.



I know eventually I probably will have to go 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

NDSS

- Go to ndss.com.au to access our Carb Counting program online and other NDSS programs and services in your state or territory, or online. You can search for the 'Carbohydrate counting' and other fact sheets and the 'Starting insulin' booklet.
- Call the **NDSS Helpline 1800 637 700** and ask to speak to a diabetes educator or a dietitian.

Peer support

- Go to the NDSS Adult Peer Support website peersupport.ndss.com.au to learn about peer support, hear from others living with diabetes, or search the directory of online and face-to-face peer support groups across Australia.
- Read the NDSS fact sheet 'Peer support for diabetes'.

Psychological support

- Go to ndss.com.au to search for 'When and how psychologists can support people with diabetes' fact sheet.

Diabetes Australia

- Go to diabetesaustralia.com.au.

Diabetes educator support

- Go to the Australian Diabetes Educators Association website at adea.com.au and search for a diabetes educator in your area. A diabetes educator can help you learn more about diabetes and insulin.

Dietitian support

- Go to dietitiansaustralia.org.au or call Dietitians Australia on **1800 812 942**. A dietitian can help you learn more about food and insulin and provide guidance on carb counting.



Top tips

- If starting insulin is a concern for you, talk with your diabetes health professional. They will assess the problem and help you work out strategies for reducing your concerns.
- Take care when searching the internet for medical advice. Make sure you consult reliable sources (e.g., professional organisations). A good place to start is by contacting the diabetes organisation in your state or territory. If you are unsure about who to contact, call the **NDSS Helpline 1800 637 700** and they can direct you.
- You might like to talk with a psychologist. They will help you find ways to cope with your concerns about using insulin. Ask your diabetes health professional if they know a psychologist in your area who is familiar with diabetes.

Notes

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The NDSS and you

Whether you have just been diagnosed with diabetes, or have been living with diabetes for a while, the NDSS provides a range of support services, information, and subsidised products to help you manage your diabetes, stay healthy and live well. For access to more resources (including translated versions), or to find out more about support services, go to **ndss.com.au** or call the **NDSS Helpline 1800 637 700**.

This information is intended as a guide only. It should not replace individual medical advice. If you have any concerns about your health, or further questions, you should contact your health professional.

Developed in collaboration with The Australian Centre for Behavioural Research in Diabetes, a partnership for better health between Diabetes Victoria and Deakin University.