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# Oral Hypoglycemic Medications

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## GENERAL INFORMATION

Oral (by mouth) hypoglycemic medications are sometimes called “diabetes pills.” They are not oral insulin. Oral hypoglycemic medications help your body make better use of your own insulin. Insulin is important because it helps glucose (sugar) go from the blood into the body cells. The body uses sugar for energy.

These medications can be used only by some people who have type 2 (non-insulin-dependent) diabetes. People who have type 1 (insulin-dependent) diabetes and some who have type 2 must have insulin injections to control their blood sugar levels.

The several types of oral hypoglycemic medications differ in how quickly they work, how long they last in the body, and their side effects. The side effects of some of the medications could be an upset stomach, loss of appetite, or a skin rash. These side effects are usually not very serious. Ask your doctor or nurse if you have any questions about your medication. Remember to tell him or her if you have an allergy to sulfa medications (antibiotics). Take your medication as directed. Do not skip taking a dose and do not take an extra dose.

Medication helps, but it cannot replace diet and exercise in controlling your blood sugar level. Diet and exercise are the keys to success in diabetes control. Your doctor, nurse, or dietitian can plan a diet that is right for you. What you eat is as important as how much you eat. If you are overweight, your diet should help you lose weight. Follow your diet plan. Skipping meals and eating poorly can lead to a low blood sugar level (a reaction you want to avoid).

Regular exercise, like walking, helps your blood circulation and helps control your blood sugar level and weight. Check with your doctor or nurse before starting exercise. By following your medication, diet, and exercise plan, you can prevent complications.

## IMPORTANT POINTS

Follow the directions of your doctor or nurse:

1. Know the signs and how to treat low blood sugar

(hypoglycemia) and high blood sugar (hyperglycemia).

2. Check with your doctor or nurse before taking any medication.
  - a. Even medications you can buy without a prescription, like aspirin, can cause side effects.
  - b. Anticoagulants (blood thinners) and some heart and gout medications can cause low blood sugar (hypoglycemia).
  - c. Steroids, some diuretics (water pills), and thyroid medications can cause high blood sugar (hyperglycemia).
  - d. Alcohol can cause low blood sugar, face flushing, and other unpleasant reactions.
3. Always carry some form of simple sugar to take at the first signs of hypoglycemia. Many of the oral hypoglycemic medications last at least 12 hours in your body. You may need to take more a little later.
4. Test your urine or blood for sugar as directed. You may also be asked to test your urine for ketones. Keep a record of the date, time, and results of any tests you do.
5. Call your doctor or nurse if you:
  - a. Are ill longer than 24 hours and are not getting better.
  - b. Cannot eat or drink.
  - c. Have an infection or are under extreme physical or emotional stress.
  - d. Have frequent hypoglycemia or hyperglycemia.
6. If you are ill or are having an operation, your doctor may prescribe insulin. Always tell a new doctor or dentist you have diabetes before any procedure or operation.
7. Always carry or wear medical identification, including:
  - a. Your medication’s name and dose \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. When to take it \_\_\_\_\_
8. You may get more information from American Diabetes Association, Inc.  
1701 N. Beauregard Street  
Alexandria, VA 22311  
1-800-DIABETES

**OTHER INSTRUCTIONS**

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