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Starting Insulin: What You Need to Know

A practical guide to using insulin safely and confidently

Starting insulin can feel like a major change in diabetes treatment. With the correct technique and a clear understanding of your insulin plan, it can become a manageable part of your daily routine.

Insulin is prescribed in different types, doses and schedules. Your insulin regimen should therefore always be followed according to the instructions given specifically to you.

Understanding Your Insulin

Different types of insulin work for different lengths of time.

Depending on your treatment plan, insulin may be used to:

- Provide background insulin throughout the day and night
- Manage the rise in glucose around meals
- Correct high blood glucose
- Provide a combination of background and mealtime insulin

Before you start, make sure you know:

Which insulin you use | Your dose | When to take it | When to check your glucose

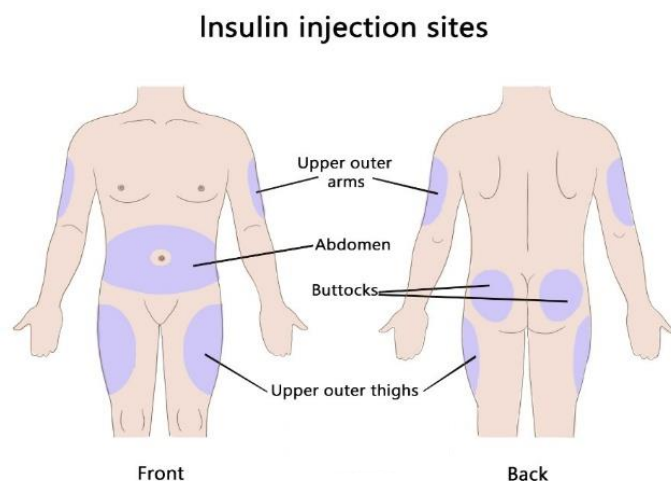
Do not change your insulin dose or timing unless you have been advised how to do so.

Where Can Insulin Be Injected?

Insulin is injected into the fatty tissue beneath the skin.

Common injection areas include:

- Abdomen
- Thighs
- Upper arms
- Buttocks



Your healthcare professional can help you identify suitable injection areas and demonstrate the correct technique.

Rotate Your Injection Sites

Avoid repeatedly injecting into exactly the same spot.



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Repeated injections in one area can cause lumps or changes in the fatty tissue beneath the skin. These changes may also make insulin absorption less predictable.

Use different spots within the recommended injection area and check your injection sites regularly.

Avoid injecting into areas that are lumpy, swollen, bruised, scarred or otherwise abnormal.

Using an Insulin Pen

If you use an insulin pen:

1. Check that you have the **correct insulin**.
2. Attach a **new needle**.
3. Prime the pen according to the instructions for your device.
4. Dial the prescribed dose.
5. Inject using the technique demonstrated to you.
6. Keep the needle in place for the recommended time to ensure the full dose is delivered.
7. Remove and safely discard the needle after the injection.



Never share an insulin pen with another person, even if the needle is changed.

Your insulin device may have specific instructions, so always follow the manufacturer's guidance and the technique demonstrated by your healthcare professional.

Storing Insulin Correctly

Insulin can lose effectiveness when exposed to inappropriate temperatures.

Unopened insulin

Unopened insulin should generally be stored in the **refrigerator according to the manufacturer's instructions**.

Insulin currently in use

Many insulin pens and vials can be kept at room temperature for a specified period once they are in use.

However, the permitted temperature and number of days after opening **vary between insulin products**.

Always check the instructions for your particular insulin.

Protect insulin from extremes



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Do not:

- Freeze insulin
- Use insulin that has been frozen
- Leave insulin in direct sunlight
- Leave it in a hot car
- Place it directly against ice or a frozen gel pack

If insulin looks different from how it normally should, or you are unsure whether it has been stored correctly, seek advice before using it.

Know About Low Blood Sugar

Insulin can cause **hypoglycaemia (low blood glucose)**.

Possible symptoms include sweating, trembling, hunger, palpitations, dizziness, weakness, difficulty concentrating or confusion.

If you use insulin, keep an appropriate source of fast-acting glucose readily available.

See also: Recognising and Managing Low Blood Sugar →

Repeated episodes of hypoglycaemia should be discussed with your treating doctor because your insulin regimen may need review.

What If I Miss an Insulin Dose?

Do not automatically take a double dose.

What you should do depends on:

- The type of insulin you use
- When the dose was due
- Your current glucose level
- Your usual insulin regimen
- Your individual medical circumstances

Follow the missed-dose instructions provided for your insulin plan. If you are unsure what to do, contact your healthcare team for advice.

Travelling With Insulin

When travelling:

- Carry sufficient insulin, needles and glucose-monitoring supplies
- Keep insulin protected from excessive heat and direct sunlight
- Do not place insulin directly on ice



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- Keep a source of fast-acting glucose with you
- Carry your insulin and essential diabetes supplies with you rather than placing them in checked baggage when flying
- Plan ahead if travelling across time zones, particularly if you use multiple insulin doses

Ask your doctor for an individualized travel plan if your insulin timing is likely to be affected.

Safe Needle Disposal

Used pen needles and syringes should be placed in an appropriate **puncture-resistant sharps container** and disposed of according to local guidance.

Never leave used needles exposed where they could injure another person.

When to Seek Medical Advice

Contact your healthcare team if you experience:

- Repeated low blood glucose
- Persistent high glucose despite taking insulin as prescribed
- Difficulty administering your insulin correctly
- New lumps or significant changes at injection sites
- Uncertainty about your insulin dose or timing
- Problems with insulin storage or your injection device

Seek urgent medical care for severe hypoglycaemia, persistent vomiting, significant illness with uncontrolled glucose, or other serious or rapidly worsening symptoms.

Quick Takeaway

Know your insulin. Know your dose. Use the correct technique. Rotate injection sites. Store insulin safely. Be prepared for hypoglycaemia.

Insulin treatment should be individualized. If you are uncertain about your dose, timing or what to do when your routine changes, seek advice rather than guessing or changing the dose yourself.

This guide provides general educational information and does not replace the insulin instructions or treatment plan provided specifically for you.