

Concerns about starting insulin

(for people with type 2 diabetes)

It's common for people with type 2 diabetes to need to intensify their treatment. Insulin is a potent treatment for reducing high blood glucose levels. Nevertheless, 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 their diabetes management. 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 hypoglycaemia (low blood glucose)
- » embarrassed about what others might think
- » angry about having to take insulin
- » like they have 'failed' (eg that 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 diabetes management, for example:

- » delaying going onto 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 starting insulin is a concern for you, talk with your health professional. They will assess the problem and help you work out strategies for reducing your concerns.

Helpline 1300 136 588

ndss.com.au

What you can do

Whether or not you currently have concerns about insulin, it's important to look after your emotional well-being.

Some of the following strategies 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 will improve your chances of managing your diabetes well. See the box for the top five reasons to use insulin. Take your time and gather information at your own pace.

A good place to start is by contacting the diabetes organisation in your state/territory. If you are unsure about who to contact, call the Diabetes Australia Helpline on 1300 136 588 and they can direct you.

Take care when searching the internet for medical advice – make sure you consult reliable sources (eg 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 (eg family, friends or your diabetes health professional). Talking through some of your feelings can be a good way of making a decision about starting insulin.



Top 5 reasons to use insulin

1. Insulin is a powerful 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 will improve your long-term health. Keeping blood glucose levels in target range* reduces your risk of long-term complications.
4. Insulin will make you feel better. Keeping blood glucose levels in target range* will give you more energy to live your life as you want.
5. Insulin comes in fast, intermediate, and long-acting forms, so 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.

Ask questions

It's okay if you don't 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 you don't 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 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 are ready, have this discussion with your health professional.

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 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 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 support group or an online community – read on to find out where you can access 'peer support'.

Talk with a professional

The strategies above may give you some ideas about how to manage any concerns you may have about insulin. However, they can't replace professional help. It's always a good idea to talk about your concerns with your health professional(s).



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. If you feel comfortable, share your feelings with them – they will give you non-judgemental support and advice. You may want to talk with your:

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

- » 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.

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.

A psychologist

You might also 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. You can also find a psychologist near you by going to the Australian Psychological Society website at www.psychology.org.au/FaP

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

More information and support

Australian Diabetes Online Community (OzDOC): weekly TweetChat
www.twitter.com/ozdiabetesoc

To connect with other people with diabetes for online peer support. The community chats online, once a week, using Twitter. Search for @OzDiabetesOC and #OzDOC.

Peer support

www.ndss.com.au
 (search for 'Publications & Resources')

To find out about what peer support is and how you can access it in your area, refer to the National Diabetes Services Scheme (NDSS) leaflet, *Peer support for diabetes*.

Diabetes Australia & NDSS
www.diabetesaustralia.com.au
www.ndss.com.au
 Helpline 1300 136 588

Diabetes Australia offers a free national NDSS Helpline, through which people with diabetes and their carers can access diabetes information, education programs, peer support groups, and other events.

"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

The NDSS and you

The NDSS provides a range of services to help you manage your diabetes. These include our Helpline and website for advice on diabetes management, NDSS products and a range of support programs to help you learn more about managing your diabetes.

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