

Patient Information

Metformin - What you need to know



You have been started on a tablet called Metformin. This is often the first medication prescribed if a healthy diet and exercise alone are not sufficient to control your blood sugar levels.

It is often used for people who are overweight because it generally does not encourage weight gain and can reduce the risk of cardiovascular complications like heart attacks.

How does Metformin work?

The main action of Metformin is to sensitise your body's cells to insulin. This then allows them to take up more glucose (sugar) from the blood.

Metformin also acts in a number of other ways to improve blood sugar levels e.g. slowing down the release of glucose from the liver, which is the main cause of elevated morning (fasting) blood glucose levels, and slowing the absorption of glucose in the gut.

Along with the benefits to blood glucose levels metformin can also have several other positive effects such as helping to reduce cholesterol levels and helping to decrease appetite.

Metformin usually takes around 3-4 weeks to have a good effect on your blood sugar levels, and it can take up to 2-3 months to see the full effect.



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How and when should I take Metformin?

You should be started initially on a low dose of metformin, which should be gradually increased over several weeks, You should try to take metformin at the same time/s each day and usually with or around a meal. This will help to lessen any side effects associated with the gut.

For example a typical starting regime for Metformin may consist of:

- Initially one tablet once a day with your breakfast for 1 week
- The following week increase this to one tablet twice a day taken with your breakfast and evening meals.
- This could then continue to increase by 1 tablet per week until the maximum dose is reached.

What about side effects?

Metformin is absorbed in the gut; therefore the most common side effects are related to the gastrointestinal tract. Not everyone will experience these and the chances of side effects can be minimised by following the instructions above on how to take your Metformin.

Side effects can include:

- Stomach aches or bloating
- Lack of appetite
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Taste disturbance (metallic taste)

Very rarely Metformin can have some more serious effects such as decreased absorption of folate and vitamin B12 leading to anaemia or a condition called lactic acidosis.

Do I need to be monitored while on Metformin?

Prior to starting Metformin you should have had a blood test to check how well your kidneys are functioning. This should be repeated at least once a year whilst on treatment.

It is particularly important that you attend for your blood tests as although Metformin does not directly affect the kidneys, it is filtered out through the kidneys, and



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therefore can build up in your blood if your kidneys are not functioning well. Therefore it is important to monitor your kidney function and if this decreases the dose of Metformin may need to be decreased or stopped.

When should I stop taking Metformin?

If you are seriously unwell and unable to keep fluids down, or suffering with diarrhoea and/or vomiting, it is important to not take your Metformin during this time and to contact a healthcare professional.

You may also be advised to stop taking your Metformin prior to surgery or prior to certain types of radiological imaging.

What about driving?

When used alone Metformin should not cause any problems with driving as it does not cause hypoglycaemia (low blood sugar).

Other information

There is a wealth of information on Diabetes available on the internet. If you would like to find out more about your diabetes, your medication, or local services that could help you improve your diabetes, we recommend: www.swindondiabetes.co.uk

Desmond

Have you been on the Desmond course before? Desmond stands for 'Diabetes Education and Self-Management for Ongoing and Newly Diagnosed'.

Desmond is a free course which can help you to:

- Find out more about Type 2 diabetes
- Manage the changes diabetes will bring to your life
- Meet and share experiences with others

If you have not been before we highly recommend you attend. Self-referral by calling: **01793 69 66 22** or GP/practice nurse can refer by completing a referral form.





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This information sheet is available to order in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 01793 604031 or email gwh.pals@nhs.net

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