



# Diabetes Medications: How They Help You

## Diabetes medications help keep you well

There are many types of diabetes medications that work in different ways to help control blood sugar. It's important to learn about these medications and talk to your care team about how they work to keep your blood sugar in control.

## Common diabetes medications and how they work

**Medication type:** biguanides

**Main site of action:** liver

**How it controls blood sugar:**

Keeps the liver from releasing too much glucose.

**Names:** metformin (Glucophage), metformin ER (extended release)

**Medication type:** GLP-1

**Main site of action:** liver, stomach, pancreas

**How it controls blood sugar:**

Helps pancreas to make more insulin, keeps the liver from releasing too much glucose, slows down food leaving your stomach.

**Names:** exenatide, liraglutide (Victoza), semaglutide (Ozempic)

**Medication type:** insulin

**Main site of action:** bloodstream

**How it controls blood sugar:**

Helps get blood sugar out of the bloodstream and into cells for energy. Most patients will choose to add insulin to achieve or maintain their blood sugar goals.

**Names:**

- *Long-acting:* NPH insulin, glargine-yfgn (Semglee)
- *Rapid-acting:* regular insulin, lispro (Humalog)

**Medication type:**

thiazolidinediones

**Main site of action:**

muscle cells

**How it controls blood sugar:** Makes muscle cells more sensitive to insulin.

**Names:** pioglitazone (Actos)

**Medication type:**

sulfonylureas

**Main site of action:**

pancreas

**How it controls blood sugar:** Helps pancreas to make more insulin.

**Names:** sulfonylureas, glipizide (Glucotrol), glimepiride (Amaryl)

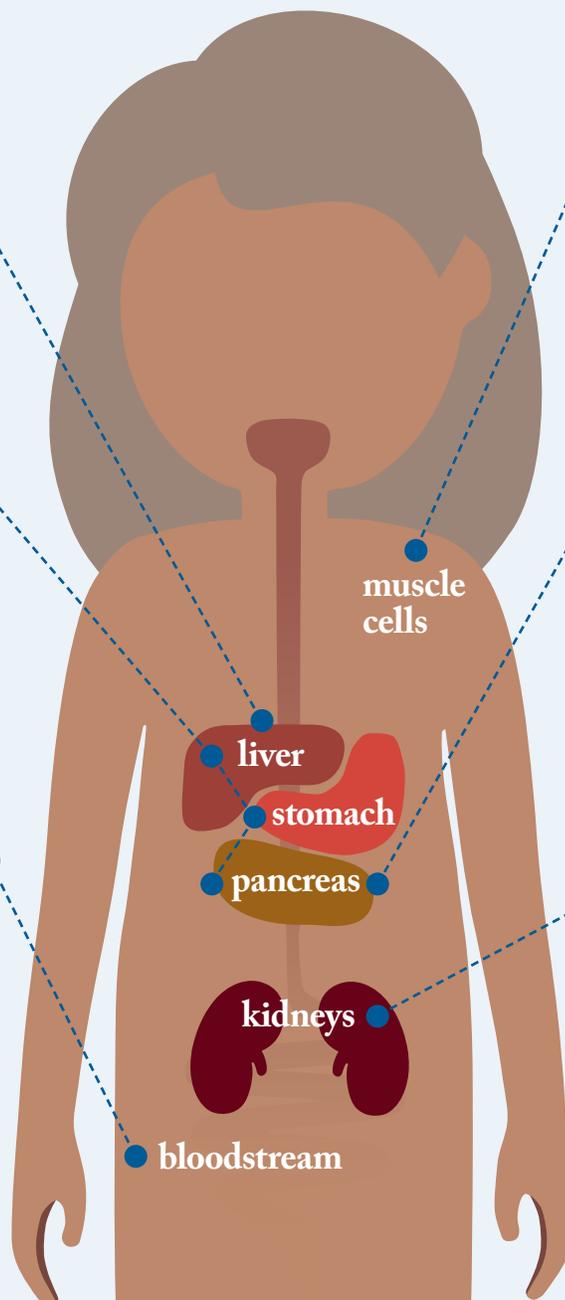
**Medication type:** SGLT2

**Main site of action:**

kidneys

**How it controls blood sugar:** Prevents the kidneys from reabsorbing glucose back into the blood.

**Names:** empagliflozin (Jardiance)



## Blood sugar goals

To lower the risk of complications, the goal for most people with diabetes is to get to an A1C test result of less than 7 percent or an estimated average glucose (eAG) result of below 150 mg/dL. If you're over age 65, or have certain health conditions such as heart disease, your doctor may recommend an A1C goal of less than 8 percent. Both the A1C and eAG tests measure your average blood sugar over the past 2 to 3 months.

## Information to remember about diabetes medicines

- Take your diabetes medications to help lower high blood sugar levels. They don't take the place of healthy eating and exercise.
- Know when and how to take the medications. Don't skip a dose unless you take a sulfonylurea or insulin and don't plan to eat a regular meal.
- Wear a medical alert bracelet for emergencies.
- Bring an updated list of your medications to your appointments to review with your doctor.

## Questions to ask your diabetes care team about your medications

- When do I need to take the medication—before a meal, with a meal, or after a meal?
- How often should I take my medication?
- Should I take it at the same time every day?
- What should I do if I forget to take my medication?
- What kind of side effects could I have, and what symptoms should I look for?
- How should I manage my medications when I'm sick and can't eat and drink as usual?

## Tips to help you remember to take your medications

- Make a chart and post it where you'll see it every day, like on the mirror in the bathroom.
- Set an alarm on your phone or watch.
- Take at certain times of the day, such as at bedtime, mealtime, or the beginning of a daily TV show.
- Use a pillbox with sections for each day of the week.
- Record taking your medications on a wallet card or calendar.
- Download the **My KP Meds** app and get reminders for when to take medications.

## It's easy to get prescription refills at Kaiser Permanente pharmacies

- Reorder your medications at least 1 to 2 weeks before you run out.
- Use the **My KP Meds** app to refill from your phone.
- Use EasyFill, our automated phone prescription refill system. Call the number in the upper right-hand corner of your prescription label, or call the pharmacy near you.
- Refill prescriptions at [kp.org/pharmacy](http://kp.org/pharmacy). You can also arrange to have many medications sent to you by mail.

## Get the app

Download the **My Doctor Online** app to view your latest A1C result, receive personalized health reminders, manage appointments, and more. Sign on at [kpdoc.org/diabetes](http://kpdoc.org/diabetes).



## HEALTH EDUCATION



This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have further questions, please consult your doctor. If you have questions or need additional information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Some photos may include models and not actual patients.