If you have type 2 diabetes, it’s important to keep your blood sugar (glucose) levels in a healthy range. Pioglitazone (Actos) is a daily medication that helps your body control blood sugar.

**How does pioglitazone help with diabetes?**

Pioglitazone can control your diabetes by:
- Helping your muscle cells use insulin better.
- Reducing the amount of sugar the liver releases into the blood.

Your liver usually stores extra sugar and releases it when your body needs it for energy. Insulin, a natural hormone, helps get sugar out of the blood and into your cells, where your body can use it.

When you have type 2 diabetes, your pancreas may no longer make enough insulin. This causes high amounts of sugar in your blood. Over time, high blood sugar levels can cause serious health problems, including kidney damage, loss of vision, and nerve damage that can lead to loss of limbs.

Pioglitazone can help you avoid these problems by making tissue in the body, especially muscle, more responsive to insulin. It’s usually taken with other diabetes medications to help:
- Keep blood sugar in the target range.
- Lower your risk for complications.

**How will I know if the medication is working?**

Regular home blood sugar testing is the easiest way to see how your medicine is working. Be sure to:
- Ask your health care team how often to test at home.
- Keep track of your results. This can help you see what changes in eating, activity, or medication may help you keep your blood sugar in a healthy range.
- Get an A1C blood test done at least every 6 months. This test also gives you an estimated average glucose (eAG) result. Together, these 2 results measure your average blood sugar over the past 2 to 3 months.

**What problems could I have if I take pioglitazone?**

Pioglitazone is usually safe and effective. However, it’s not safe for people with heart failure, liver problems, or bladder cancer. The most common side effect is water retention. This may cause weight gain and swelling. There are also concerns about increased risk of fracture.

Pioglitazone may increase a woman’s chance of getting pregnant. If this is a concern, talk to your care team about birth control options.
When should I treat a low blood sugar?

For most people, a blood sugar level below 70 mg/dL is too low. Signs of low blood sugar may include feeling:

- Shaky, sweaty, or nervous
- Hungry
- Angry
- Light-headed

If you have any of these symptoms, test your blood sugar right away.

Use the 15/15 rule to treat low blood sugar:
1. Eat or drink 15 grams of a carbohydrate that your body can absorb quickly. For example:
   - 3 to 4 glucose tablets
   - 1 tube glucose gel
   - ½ cup fruit juice
   - 1 cup lowfat or fat-free milk
2. Wait 15 minutes and test again. If your reading is still under 70 mg/dL, eat or drink another 15 grams of carbohydrate.
3. Repeat steps 1 to 3 one more time if blood sugars are still under 70 mg/dL.

If your blood sugar is back in the normal range, eat a small meal such as half of a small sandwich with a glass of milk to keep your blood sugar in a good range.

If your blood sugar is still low after following the 15/15 rule, contact your doctor or care team right away. Always carry a carbohydrate source to treat low blood sugar as soon as it happens.

How can I manage my medications?

Refill your medicines at least 2 weeks before you run out. You can refill:

- Online at kp.org/refill and have your prescriptions mailed to you.
- By phone. Look for the Easy Refill number on the upper corner of your prescription bottle or package.
- In person at your local Kaiser Permanente pharmacy.
- Download the My KP Meds app and get refill reminders.

To track your medications and doses:

- Use the My KP Meds app
- Keep a list
- Use a pill box

Wear medical identification at all times. For more information call 888-633-4298 or go to MedicAlert.org.

When to call us

Call the Appointment and Advice Call Center at 866-454-8855 or contact your doctor or care team if you have:

- Unusual weight gain or uncomfortable swelling in your legs, ankles, or feet (edema).
- Unusual shortness of breath or trouble breathing.
- Increased weakness or fatigue.
- Blood sugar levels below 70 mg/dL before eating, 3 or more times in one week (hypoglycemia).