

A reminder list for patients starting insulin (as shown by diabetes specialist nurses)

Other formats

If you need this leaflet in another format such as Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service:

- 01392 402093 (for Mid Devon, East Devon and Exeter services)
- 01271 314090 (for North Devon services)
- rduh.pals@nhs.net

This is a quick reminder of some of the things you need to know about starting insulin.

Repeat prescriptions

You will need the following on repeat prescription from your GP surgery:

- Insulin – as cartridges or disposable pens
- Insulin needles
- Lancets needles for fingerpricking device
- Blood glucose test strips
- Blood ketone test strips if you have type one diabetes
- Continuous glucose sensors – note that these may not be available for everybody, and continuous glucose monitoring may be postponed for a few weeks or months
- Sharps disposal bin/safe

Hypoglycaemia: low glucose level

If you are on insulin, treat any glucose level below four mmol/L as a hypo. You should also treat yourself if you feel hypo and your glucose is close to this level.

Example hypo treatments: a small glass (approx 120ml or a small carton) of fruit juice or full-sugar soft drink, or five jelly babies or four to five dextrose sweets.

Insulin injections

- Gently rock the insulin pen for 60 seconds. Screw a new needle onto the end until hand tight, then remove two covers
- Do a two-unit air shot. Look for droplets at the end of the needle. If you do not see a droplet then repeat. Change the needle if there isn't a droplet the second time
- Dial up the dose of insulin required, inject, press the plunger, count to 10
- Remove the needle for safe disposal

Insulin injection sites

Recommended sites are your tummy, buttocks, and upper outer thighs.

Some people also inject in the backs of the upper arms. This is less suitable for slimmer people. It is also a small area, so there is a risk of using the same place repeatedly.

If you have separate fast-acting and long-acting insulin, it is usually best to use the tummy or buttocks for fast-acting insulin. This is because insulin is absorbed more quickly from these areas than from the thighs or arms.

Insulin injection site rotation

Don't inject insulin frequently into the same place, as this can cause fatty lumps to develop in the skin (lipohypertrophy). You can avoid this by using different places for injections and having a system for moving your injections around.

Example of a rotation system for injections in the abdomen:

- Imagine a cross through your belly button, dividing your tummy into four sections. Use each section for a week, and then let it rest for three weeks
- Inject in each section (e.g. bottom right) for a week. Move your injection sites round in a circle within this section, about an inch apart each time

Insulin storage

Replace the insulin cartridge or disposable pen after it has been in use for a month, even if not empty. While in use, keep it out of direct sunlight or high temperatures (over 30°C).

Keep unused insulin in the fridge. Don't let your insulin freeze or pass its expiry date.

Blood testing lancets

Change the lancet twice a week as a guide if you do four tests per day. Change sooner if you struggle to get blood from your finger, or if it is sore.

Sharps disposal

- 'Sharps' includes insulin needles and lancet needles for fingerprickers. If you use glucose sensors, the applicator also contains a needle and should be treated as a 'sharp'
- Sharps must be disposed of in a sharps box. If you are not given one, then you can ask your local pharmacist
- Contact your local council waste/environmental department to arrange collection of the full box
- **Please do not put sharps in household waste as they are an infection hazard.**

Driving

- You must inform DVLA if you start insulin treatment. While waiting for your new licence, you can continue to drive if your diabetes team think it is safe. It is advisable not to drive for at least a few days while learning about insulin and blood testing
- You must inform your motor insurer, as if you do not declare medical conditions your insurance may not be valid
- You must always have hypo treatment with you when driving. You must always have a fingerprick blood tester, even if you mainly use a continuous glucose sensor
- You must check your glucose level before driving. If glucose is five mmol/L or above and you feel fine then you are safe to drive. If glucose is four to five mmol/L and you feel fine then you must have a snack but are safe to drive. **Never drive if you feel hypo or if your glucose level is below four mmol/L**
- If your glucose reading is ok then you may drive for the next two hours as long as you continue to feel fine. You must not drive for more than two hours after the last glucose check. For longer journeys, you must plan to stop at least every two hours
- If you feel a hypo coming on when driving, or think a hypo might be coming on, pull over as soon as it is safe. Check your glucose level. If your glucose level is low or low for you, take hypo treatment. Repeat the hypo treatment if needed after five-10 minutes. Once your glucose level is over five mmol/L, you must wait 45 minutes and also ensure you feel fine before driving again

Getting advice about your diabetes

You can contact the diabetes specialist nurses (DSNs) at your local hospital as below.

Exeter: please call the hospital switchboard on 01392 411611 between 9am and 1pm. Please ask the automated service for the operator. When speaking with the operator, ask for the adult diabetes specialist nurse on call. You will then be transferred to a mobile number.

Barnstaple: please call 01271 322726 between 9am and 5pm.

Your notes

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern, please contact PALS:

- 01392 402093 (for Mid Devon, East Devon and Exeter services)
- 01271 314090 (for North Devon services)
- rduh.pals@nhs.net

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Scan the QR code to visit the Care Opinion website →

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