

Medicines for Type 2 Diabetes That May Do More Than Control Blood Sugar

Having Diabetes Is Not Just About Your Blood Sugar

Making sure you manage your blood sugar (glucose) is important when you have diabetes -- blood sugar that's not controlled can lead to problems throughout your body. But having diabetes can also mean you have a high chance (risk) of getting heart disease that can lead to a heart attack, stroke, or heart failure (where your heart can't pump enough blood), or death from heart problems. So when discussing your diabetes treatment plan and what options may be available for you, your doctor will also consider your risk for heart disease.

Certain types of diabetes medicines used to help control blood sugar can also help reduce your risk for heart disease. These include:

- **GLP-1 (glucagon-like peptide-1) receptor agonists**, such as dulaglutide, liraglutide, and semaglutide, available as a shot (injection)
- **SGLT2 (sodium-glucose cotransporter-2) inhibitors**, such as canagliflozin, dapagliflozin, and empagliflozin, available as a pill

These medicines work differently from each other, so talk to your doctor about which treatment options they may recommend to help lower your blood sugar to a healthy level (80 to 130 mg/dL).

Possible Side Effects of Diabetes Medicines

When discussing your treatment plan, your doctor will also consider any possible side effects that may happen. Depending on which diabetes medicine you're taking, common side effects can include:



- Nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, heartburn, constipation, gas, or stomach pain/cramping
- Weakness, dizziness, drowsiness, or nervousness
- Headache, runny nose, or sore throat
- Skin reactions, such as redness, pain, or rash (with pills or shots)
- Urinary tract infections (UTIs)
- Swelling

Serious side effects of certain diabetes medicines can include an increased risk for pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas), heart failure, cancer, or bone fractures.

Insulin and sulfonylureas are 2 types of diabetes medicines that may cause hypoglycemia -- blood sugar that's too low (below 70 mg/dL) -- as a side effect, especially if taken with other medicines for diabetes. Symptoms of hypoglycemia can include sweating; feeling tired, dizzy, moody, or hungry; or having a fast heartbeat or shaking. Be sure to ask your doctor about what to do if you have hypoglycemia.

Some types of medicines for diabetes -- such as thiazolidinediones (TZDs), sulfonylureas, and insulin -- may also cause weight gain as a side effect. If weight gain is a concern for you, be sure to let your doctor know.

A Healthy Lifestyle Is Important

Having a healthy lifestyle can help both your diabetes and your heart, and maintaining a healthy weight, eating a nutritious diet, and getting exercise are important parts of your diabetes treatment plan.

Ways to have a healthy lifestyle and help lower your blood sugar and your risk for heart disease include:



- Eat a well-balanced, nutritious diet and avoid foods and drinks with added sugar
- Get enough physical activity -- talk to your doctor about the right kind and amount of exercise for you
- Drink plenty of water
- Limit alcohol
- Don't smoke
- Get enough sleep each night
- Find ways to manage stress

Talking to Your Doctor About Your Diabetes Treatment Plan

Talk to your doctor about what diet, exercise, and medicine they may recommend for you as part of your diabetes treatment plan to help you control your blood sugar and keep your heart healthy.

Questions to ask your doctor can include:

How can diabetes affect my risk for heart disease?

Which medicines for diabetes are available, and what are their side effects?

What type of diet and exercise do you recommend for me?

Are there any lifestyle changes I should make?

Are there any other doctors or specialists I should see?