



**DiABETES UK**  
KNOW DIABETES. FIGHT DIABETES.

# DIABETES AND INSULIN

The essentials

## DIABETES AND INSULIN

**More than 4.9 million people in the UK have diabetes, which causes too much sugar – or glucose – in the blood.**

As well as a healthy lifestyle, people with type 1 – and some people with type 2 or gestational diabetes – need insulin to manage their blood glucose levels.

We know it can be daunting to inject or wear an insulin pump or monitor in public. But it's nothing to worry or be ashamed about. It's a really important part of keeping you safe and well.

Our researchers are doing everything they can in their search for a cure. But, currently, insulin's the best way to manage your blood glucose levels and prevent damage to your eyes, kidneys, nerves, heart and blood vessels.

Whether you're new to insulin or have been using it a while, this guide will take you through the essentials, so you can learn about the care and support you should expect. The more you know, the easier it'll be to manage your diabetes and the more confident you'll become.

Make sure to discuss these topics with your healthcare professional – this could be your doctor, nurse, pharmacist or another professional who helps you manage your diabetes. Do this at least once a year, but sooner or more often if you wish.

# THE ESSENTIALS

## 1 Understanding your insulin doses or regimen

There are different ways to use and combine insulins, called regimens. When you start or review your insulins, you should agree with your healthcare professional the best regimen to meet your personal needs and lifestyle. If you have any questions, they should be answered to your satisfaction.

## 2 Feeling comfortable and confident about injecting

When you start insulin, you should do the first injection with your healthcare professional. This could be a test injection or your first insulin injection. You should feel comfortable about your insulin injections and be able to adjust your insulin doses with confidence.

## 3 Understanding how to monitor your blood glucose levels

Your healthcare professional should show you how to test and record your blood glucose levels. They should explain your numbers, your target ranges and when to monitor your blood glucose levels.



## 4 Understanding and using your blood glucose readings or data

Review your blood glucose data with your healthcare professional and use this to guide your care and treatment. You should be shown how to download or record and understand your own blood glucose readings, to help your self-management.

## 5 Looking after your injection sites

You will be shown how and where to inject. Rotating your injection site is important to reduce the risk of developing lumpy areas. Your injection sites should be discussed with your healthcare professional, who will want to check them from time to time. This is particularly important if your blood glucose control deteriorates or is erratic for no obvious reason.

## 6 Having the equipment you need and knowing how to use it

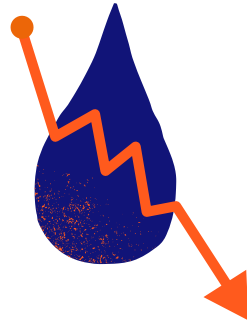
You should be shown how to use the different pieces of equipment you need to inject your insulin and monitor your blood glucose safely. Your healthcare professional should also explain how to safely dispose of sharps, like needles. Arrangements should be made for you to easily re-order your equipment on prescription.



## 7 Understanding and managing hypoglycaemia

Your healthcare professional should discuss how to recognise and manage low blood glucose levels, also called hypoglycaemia or hypo's. A hypo happens when your blood glucose level is too low, usually below 4mmol/l. How many hypos you've had, when you've had them and how well you recognise them should be discussed at your annual review or earlier if you are concerned. Find out more about having a hypo here:

[diabetes.org.uk/ie/hypo](https://diabetes.org.uk/ie/hypo)



## 8 Storing insulin

Your healthcare team will suggest how much insulin to get and store at home. The best place to keep the insulin you're not using is in the fridge, because the ideal storage temperature is 2 to 6°C. For the insulin you're using on the day room temperature is usually fine, but this can change if the heating is on or it's summer. Always read the information leaflet that comes with your insulin or ask your healthcare team for more advice.



## 9 Managing insulin when you're unwell

Your healthcare professional should discuss what you need to know if you're unwell and how to use so-called 'sick day rules'. Ideally, you should be given written information or be told where to find it. Find out more about managing diabetes when unwell here:

[diabetes.org.uk/ie/illness](https://diabetes.org.uk/ie/illness)

## 10 Safe driving and insulin therapy

Your healthcare professional should discuss driving regulations and what these mean for you. There are legal requirements around informing the DVLA (DVA in Northern Ireland) when starting insulin, driving, self-monitoring of blood glucose and treatment of hypoglycaemia. You should also check your motor insurance policy and may need to inform your insurance provider. Find out more here: [diabetes.org.uk/ie/driving](https://diabetes.org.uk/ie/driving)



## 11 Access to ongoing support around insulin and diabetes

You should be able to access additional support and talk to other people with diabetes if you wish. This may be available locally or via Diabetes UK. Some areas may have courses available to help people manage their insulin and our Learning Zone can also help.

## 12 Access to the right technology for you

Technology can be an important part of how you manage your diabetes. Your healthcare professional can advise on what tech might suit you best. You may be able to get it prescribed free through the NHS. Find out more about the different tech available and how to access it here:

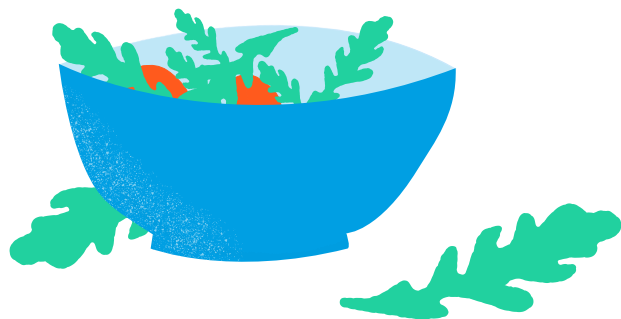
[diabetes.org.uk/ie/technology](https://diabetes.org.uk/ie/technology)



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### Access to specialist dietary advice

If you're starting insulin or having difficulty managing your blood glucose levels, you should be able to access specialist dietary advice if needed, to support your self-management.



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### Access to emotional support

Just like everyone else, people with diabetes may experience anxiety, depression or distress, and sometimes these feelings relate to diabetes. This can make self-management more difficult. You should be able to talk about your emotional wellbeing with your healthcare professional, and be able to access specialist support if you need it.

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### Access to other specialist advice when needed

You should be referred for appropriate specialist help and advice if your healthcare professional can't help with a particular issue you're experiencing.

# USEFUL LINKS AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

If you need any further advice, help or information with regards to the topics discussed in this booklet, please ask your healthcare professional. You can also:

Read more about insulin on the Diabetes UK website: [diabetes.org.uk/ie/insulin](https://diabetes.org.uk/ie/insulin)

Visit Diabetes UK learning zone: [diabetes.org.uk/learn](https://diabetes.org.uk/learn)

Call the Diabetes UK helpline: **0345 123 2399**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm

Or email: [helpline@diabetes.org.uk](mailto:helpline@diabetes.org.uk)

Join our online support forum: [diabetes.org.uk/ie/forum](https://diabetes.org.uk/ie/forum)

This leaflet was developed in partnership with:



**Diabetes Leeds Partnership**

The NHS in Leeds and Leeds Clinical Commissioning Group working together

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