

DIABETES MEDICATIONS: TYPES OF INSULIN

TRANSCRIPT (page 1 of 2)

To keep your blood glucose in a healthy range, you may be prescribed insulin. There are several different types of insulin used to manage diabetes. They are: rapid-acting, short-acting, intermediate-acting, and long-acting. Insulins are grouped into one of these types based on their actions.

How quickly they begin to lower your blood glucose is called onset. The time they are working the hardest to lower your blood glucose is called peak, and how long they work to lower your blood glucose is called duration.

It's important to know which kind of insulin you use and understand how it works. Rapid-acting insulin includes lispro, aspart, and glulisine [on screen Humalog, Novolog, Apidra]. Please note that these are the generic names of these medications. You're probably more familiar with the brand names. These will appear on screen as we list the generic names.

Their onset begins very quickly, usually within 15 minutes. They peak at 30 minutes to 1 ½ hours, and their duration is a total of 3 to 4 hours. Since rapid-acting insulin begins to lower your blood glucose almost immediately, you must be ready to begin eating your meal before you take it; otherwise, your blood glucose could drop too low.

The only type of short-acting insulin is regular [on screen: Novolin R, Humulin R]. Its onset is in about 30 minutes to an hour after injection. Its peak is at 2 to 3 hours, and its duration is three to 6 hours.

The only intermediate-acting insulin is NPH. Its onset is in about 2 to 4 hours, its peak at four to 10 hours, and its duration is 10 to 18 hours.

There are two long-acting insulins: detemir and glargine [on-screen: Levemir, Lantus]. Long-acting insulin onset happens in a little more than an hour, and it works at the same level for up to 24 hours with no peaks. It's important to take long-acting insulin at the same time every day.

Many factors will help you and your diabetes care team determine which insulin, or insulins, will work best to help you achieve your blood glucose goals. These factors include the type of diabetes you have, your age, your weight and your lifestyle.

(cont. next page)

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TRANSCRIPT (page 2 of 2)

Sometimes using more than one insulin achieves the best blood glucose results. Taking more than one insulin can even out your blood glucose level throughout the day. You may take a long-acting insulin to provide a steady dose of insulin throughout the day, and inject a rapid-acting insulin just before each meal.

"My insulin routine is I take one insulin shot, and that lasts for 24 hours a day. And then I take a shot every time I eat."

Some people inject two insulins in the same syringe at the same time; a shorter acting and an intermediate-acting insulin. These are called mixed doses, and may be mixed by hand, or they may be premixed. Be aware, however, that long-acting insulins detemir and glargine cannot be mixed with other insulins.

Remember, the goal of using insulin is to keep your blood glucose in your target range throughout the day. This may help you avoid complications from diabetes in the future.