

Starting insulin for your diabetes

You need to start using insulin to help you stay well, control your diabetes and avoid its complications. You are likely to need to use insulin every day.

What is insulin and why do you need to take extra?

Insulin helps get the sugar from food into the body's cells so it can be used as energy.

With diabetes, your body produces less insulin and the cells ignore the effect of insulin. This means that the sugar remains in your blood, and the cells of your muscles and organs don't get enough energy. Excess sugar in the blood damages the blood vessels which will cause hypertension, strokes and heart attacks and affect your eyes, kidneys and feet. If you don't have enough energy in your muscles and organs you will feel tired and weak.

Using insulin will help you stay well, control your diabetes and avoid its complications.

Does insulin cause side effects?

Insulin lowers the sugar in your blood. If you use too much, your sugar level might get too low.

If you feel dizzy, sweaty, shaky or confused, you may have low blood sugar. This can be serious if not treated fast. **Eat or drink something sugary immediately.** Follow with starchy food like a sandwich. If you are no better or it happens more than once, seek healthcare.

Checking your diabetes control

- HbA_{1c} is a blood test you will get at the healthcare facility. It shows the average level of your blood sugar over the past 3 months. Your HbA_{1c} goal is below 8% (ideally below 7%).
- You will check your blood sugar level at home. Your healthcare worker will tell you how and when to do this and how to adjust your insulin dose if you need to. Your blood sugar goal is between 5.0 and 8.5.

Store insulin and needles with care

- Keep your unused stock of insulin in the fridge. Store opened insulin bottles or pens at room temperature.
- Keep insulin away from the sun and don't keep it for longer than a month.
- Needles are a danger to others. Keep used needles in a safe container.
- Take it to the pharmacy at your healthcare facility to throw away safely.

STAY SAFE

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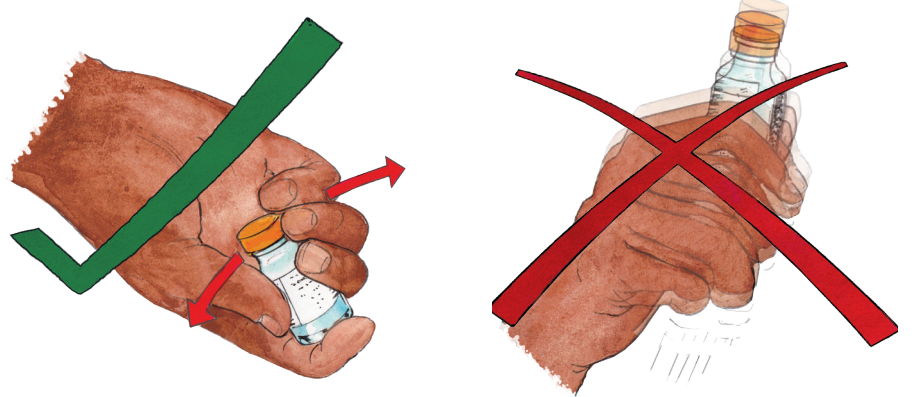
How to give yourself an insulin injection

Use the same needle for up to 6 injections. Change the needle sooner if injecting causes pain.

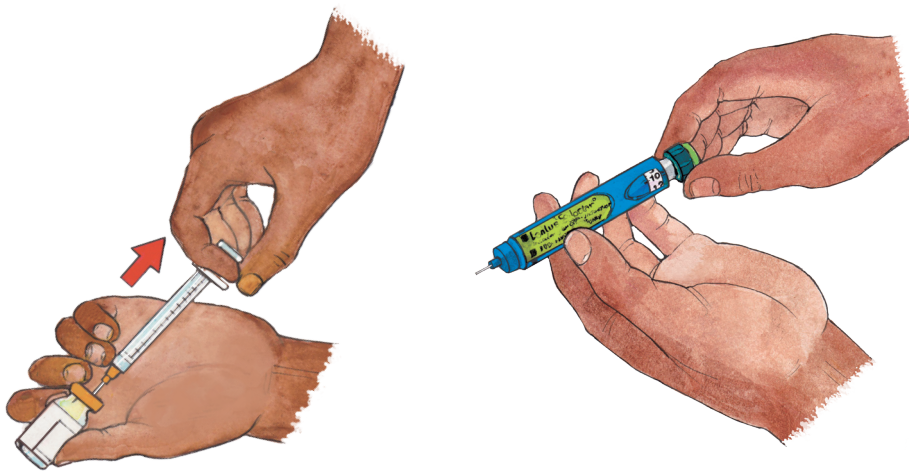
1. Keep clean: Wash your hands. There is no need to clean the injection area unless your skin is dirty.



2. Tilt the insulin bottle side-to-side. Don't shake it.



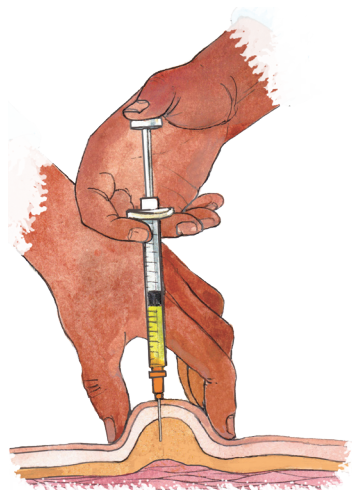
3. Prepare the insulin:
 - a. Syringe and needle: draw up the amount of insulin you need out of the bottle.
 - b. Pen: turn the dial to the number of units.



4. Choose an area to inject. Remember to rotate your injection sites.



5. Pinch up a fold of skin and insert the needle



6. Inject:
 - a. Needle: inject the insulin into your skin.
 - b. Pen: Push down the top of the pen. Keep it pushed down and the needle in your skin whilst you count slowly to 10.



For more information and advice, contact Diabetes South Africa - WhatsApp: 081 578 6636



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