

## Reducing side effects

Wait until your body has got used to the medicine before going to the next step. Most people can go up by one step each week but it can take longer. You may sometimes need to go back a step. It's ok if your body can only manage 2000mg each day.

- **Feeling sick** - take metformin with food to reduce the chances of feeling sick. Make sure you increase your dose slowly over several weeks.
- **Being sick (vomiting) or diarrhoea** - drink lots of fluids, such as water or squash, to avoid [dehydration](#). Take small, frequent sips if you're being sick. Speak to a pharmacist if you have signs of dehydration, such as passing urine less than usual or having dark, strong-smelling urine. Do not take any other medicines to treat [diarrhoea or vomiting](#) without speaking to a pharmacist or doctor.
- **Stomach pain** - try to rest and relax. It can help to eat and drink slowly and have smaller and more frequent meals. Putting a heat pad or covered hot water bottle on your stomach may also help. If you're in a lot of pain, speak to your pharmacist or doctor.
- **Loss of appetite** - eat when you'd usually expect to be hungry. If it helps, eat smaller meals more often than usual.
- **A metallic taste in the mouth** - if you find that metformin is giving you a metallic taste in the mouth, try chewing sugar-free gum.

## Useful websites

[www.patient.info/medicine/metformin](http://www.patient.info/medicine/metformin)

[www.nhs.uk/medicines/metformin](http://www.nhs.uk/medicines/metformin)



# Metformin

A guide for patients  
of Leigh View Medical Practice

Updated March 2020

# Metformin



Metformin is a commonly prescribed drug to treat diabetes.

Metformin helps to lower your blood glucose to as normal a level as possible. If you are an overweight adult, taking Metformin hydrochloride over a long period of time also helps to reduce weight and lower the risk of complications associated with diabetes such as heart attacks and strokes.

Metformin is used when diet and exercise alone have not been enough to control your blood glucose levels. It is used particularly in overweight patients. It can be taken on its own or together with other medicines to treat diabetes.

## Side-effects of metformin

Common side effects are feeling sick, loss of appetite, a metallic taste, tummy pains and diarrhoea. We can help avoid these side effects by starting with a small dose and always taking metformin with food. These side effects usually settle down by themselves once your body gets used to the medicine.

Rare: Metformin cause too much acid in the blood if you become very ill. This is called lactic acidosis. It usually happens when people are unwell with a severe illness or infection. You need to seek advice if you get any warning signs of:

- Feeling generally unwell with severe tiredness, fast or shallow breathing, being cold and a slow heartbeat.
- yellow skin or the whites of your eyes turn yellow - these can be signs of liver problems

As a precaution, you may be advised to stop taking metformin for a short period prior to having certain investigations- the hospital will let you know if this is the case.

Metformin does not cause low blood sugar (“hypos”) when taken on its own, but this can happen when other diabetic drugs are prescribed. Your GP/ nurse will discuss this with you.

Rare: your skin can go itchy, red or have wheals (also known as hives). You can take piriton or another anti-histamine medicine if you get this. You should stop taking metformin if you have skin reactions.

## How is metformin taken?

There are two types of metformin. Standard metformin and modified release metformin. Most patients will be prescribed standard metformin first. If you have difficulties or side effects with standard release metformin then we may try modified release metformin.

### **Take with or shortly after food**

**Standard** metformin is taken as follows:

- ⇒ 500mg with evening meal for 1st week
- ⇒ 500mg with breakfast and evening meal for 2nd week
- ⇒ 2 x 500mg with breakfast and evening meal for 3rd week
- ⇒ 2 x 500mg with breakfast and 2 with evening meal for the 4th week

**Modified release** metformin can be taken once or twice a day. Once a day, it is taken as follows:

- ⇒ 500mg with evening meal for 1 week
- ⇒ then increase to 2x500mg with evening meal for 2nd week
- ⇒ then 3x500mg for 3rd week, then 4x500mg – continue until review