



You May Be at Risk

You are currently taking a sulfonylurea diabetic medication:

- Chlorpropamide (Diabinese®, Glucamide®)
- Glyburide (DiaBeta®, Glynase® PresTab®, Micronase®)

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THIS MEDICATION



QUIZ

Sulfonylurea medication

1. Sulfonylurea medication is a type of drug commonly used to treat diabetes. There are no safety concerns about this class of medication. **TRUE** **FALSE**
2. Compared to other diabetic medication, sulfonylurea drugs increase the risk of low blood sugar, dizziness and fainting. **TRUE** **FALSE**
3. Low blood sugar (hypoglycemia) is linked to memory problems and falls. **TRUE** **FALSE**
4. The sulfonylurea class of medication is the best available option to treat my diabetes. **TRUE** **FALSE**



ANSWERS



1. FALSE

Research shows that patients over age 65 who take a sulfonylurea medication to manage their diabetes have a 50 % higher risk of low blood sugar episodes than those who take other antidiabetic agents.

2. TRUE

Low blood sugar (hypoglycemia) caused by sulfonylureas can cause shakiness, cold sweats, anxious feelings, dizziness and even fainting in patients aged 65 and over.

3. TRUE

Low blood sugar (hypoglycemia) induced by sulfonylureas is linked to memory problems and falls in patients aged 65 and over.

4. FALSE

There are other antidiabetic agents with fewer side effects that may be safer for you. Bring this document to discuss with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist or read the *Alternatives* section for more solutions.

DID YOU KNOW?



Sulfonylurea medication is prescribed to manage diabetes. The aim of the treatment for diabetes is to keep blood glucose (sugar) levels as near to normal as possible and to allow the body to make efficient use of glucose.



Patients over the age of 65 years taking sulfonylurea medication to manage diabetes have a 50% increased risk of low blood sugar (hypoglycemia) compared to those who take other antidiabetic agents. Certain side effects associated with sulfonylurea medication, like fainting, falling or dizziness, can increase the risk of hospitalization.



Other side effects of sulfonylurea medication are: unexpected tiredness or weakness, involuntary weight gain, yellowing of the skin or whites of the eyes, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and loss of appetite.

If you have or had any of the above-mentioned side effects, talk to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist about it.

WARNING

Interactions have been reported between sulfonylureas and other commonly prescribed medications.

Review your medications with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

SO ASK YOURSELF:

YES OR NO?

In the last 3 months has your blood sugar level been lower than 5 mmol/l (or 90 mg/dl)?

Y **N**

Have you experienced shakiness, cold sweats, dizziness, headaches or felt tired?

Y **N**

Do you have nightmares or wake up suddenly in the middle of the night for no reason?

Y **N**

Do you snack regularly to avoid low blood sugar (hypoglycemia)?

Y **N**

AS YOU AGE

Age-related changes take place in your body and modify the way you process medications. The chances you will take more than one medication increases as you age, as does your likelihood of having multiple chronic illnesses. Drugs stay in your body longer and diminished liver function and poor blood flow to your kidneys may increase side effects, including hypoglycemia. The optimal levels of HbA1c do not have to be so closely monitored as you get older. Discuss these changes and your HbA1c blood test with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

BEWARE OF HYPOGLYCEMIA

Although hypoglycemia is part of the day-to-day life of diabetics, the risks of hypoglycemia grow exponentially in patients over the age of 65, as do the consequences. Hypoglycemia can affect your brain and your mental and psychological health. If you take more than 5 medications, this could make you even more vulnerable to low blood sugar.

Teaming up with your doctor, nurse and/or pharmacist to avoid low blood sugar episodes can help reduce the risks.

The symptoms of hypoglycemia include:

- Cold or clammy hands
- Shakiness
- Nervousness
- Loss of motor control
- Tiredness
- Irritability
- Confusion
- Blurred vision
- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Stomach pain
- Fainting or loss of consciousness



ALTERNATIVES

Discuss the possibility of discontinuing or substituting the sulfonylurea drug with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Regular physical activity, healthy eating and reaching a healthy body weight may be all you need to manage your diabetes. These simple lifestyle changes can improve the management of your blood sugar levels and reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease associated with being overweight.

- Set a weight loss goal of 5 to 10% of your actual weight.
- Schedule 150 minutes per week of aerobic exercises and resistance training (30 minutes 5 times per week or 50 minutes 3 times per week).
- Talk to a dietician or follow an official food guide. See these guides online:
www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/canada-food-guides.html

We suggest you talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise program.

If you still need to take a diabetic medication to control your blood sugar levels, ask your doctor what best treatment is for you.

Please consult your doctor, nurse or pharmacist before stopping any medication.



MRS. WHITE'S STORY

"I am 78 years old and have been taking glyburide for 10 years to manage my diabetes. For many years, everything went well and my blood sugar levels were normal. Lately, I started feeling dizzy. On a few occasions, I even had palpitations and cold sweats. I took my blood sugar level and it was 3.2 mmol/l (58 mg/dl), which is much too low. I spoke to my pharmacist who suggested that my doctor revise my diabetes medications. She thought the culprit could be glyburide, which is no longer recommended at my age.

I spoke to my doctor who had just received the latest clinical guidelines from the Diabetes Association. New research shows that taking glyburide at my age could be dangerous, since it can increase the risk of hypoglycemia which can cause memory problems and falls. I feel lucky that nothing serious has happened to me. My doctor had me stop glyburide completely. At first I was afraid my diabetes would get worse, but I was pleasantly surprised to notice that my blood sugar tests were normal. Now, I do not feel dizzy anymore. My cold sweats and palpitations have disappeared and I feel less tired, less anxious and less irritable.

With this renewed energy, I started exercising. I even lost a few pounds! I continue to visit my doctor and pharmacist regularly to monitor my blood sugar levels. My doctor told me that one day he might prescribe another diabetic medication, but for now, exercise and weight loss are sufficient to keep my blood sugar levels normal. I am grateful to be able to count on such dedicated health professionals."

