

Type 2 Diabetes

The body's cells ignore insulin's signal, and the pancreas cannot make enough to overcome that silence.

THE STORY IN ONE SENTENCE

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"Type 2 Diabetes — insulin resistance plus beta-cell failure; lifestyle and metformin first, add SGLT2 inhibitors or GLP-1 agonists for heart and kidney protection."

Normal anatomy — the body's job

Insulin is the key that unlocks muscle, fat, and liver cells so blood sugar can step inside and power your body. When this system works, your blood sugar stays steady all day.

BODY'S JOB

The pancreas releases insulin after you eat. Insulin binds to receptors (door locks) on muscle, fat, and liver cells, opening channels that let glucose (blood sugar) flow inside. Muscle cells burn glucose for movement. Fat cells store it for later. Liver cells package it or release it between meals to keep your blood sugar from dropping too low. This keeps your blood sugar in a narrow, safe range—roughly 70 to 100 mg/dL when fasting.

1. You eat a meal → blood sugar rises.
2. The pancreas senses high sugar → beta cells release insulin into the blood.
3. Insulin travels to muscle, fat, and liver → binds to receptors on cell surfaces.
4. Receptors open glucose channels → sugar steps inside cells.
5. Cells use sugar for energy or storage → blood sugar drops back to normal.
6. Between meals, the liver releases stored sugar in small amounts → keeps blood sugar steady.
7. The cycle repeats with every meal, keeping fuel delivery smooth and blood sugar balanced.

What breaks

The doors on muscle, fat, and liver cells stop opening when insulin knocks, and the pancreas cannot make enough insulin to force them open anymore.

CLINICAL TERM

Insulin resistance (cells do not respond normally to insulin signaling) plus progressive beta-cell dysfunction (the pancreas loses the ability to secrete enough insulin to compensate).

How the body compensates

The pancreas tries to rescue you by making extra insulin, and the kidneys dump sugar into urine to lower blood levels. These tricks hide the problem for years, but they cannot last—and when they fail, damage accelerates fast.

1. {'step': 'Beta cells double or triple insulin output', 'why': 'For months or years, the pancreas pumps out two to three times the normal amount of insulin to overcome cell resistance. Blood sugar stays near-normal, so you feel fine and lab tests may not flag anything yet. This is the dangerous quiet phase—damage is starting, but you cannot see it.'}
2. {'step': 'Kidneys spill sugar into urine', 'why': 'When blood glucose climbs above about 180 mg/dL, the kidneys hit their limit and start dumping sugar into urine (glycosuria) to protect you from even higher levels. You pee a lot, lose water, and feel thirsty. This lowers blood sugar a little but dehydrates you.'}
3. {'step': 'The liver releases stress hormones', 'why': 'Because cells are starving (insulin resistance blocks fuel delivery), the body thinks it is in a famine and releases cortisol (stress hormone) and glucagon (a hormone that tells the liver to release more sugar). This raises blood sugar even higher, trying to force fuel into cells—but it backfires because the doors are still jammed.'}
4. {'step': 'Compensation fails—beta cells burn out', 'why': 'High blood sugar is toxic to beta cells (glucotoxicity). They shrink, stop working, or die. Insulin output drops. Now blood sugar climbs fast—fasting glucose over 126 mg/dL, hemoglobin A1c over 6.5 percent. You cross the line into diabetes, and the window to reverse it with lifestyle alone starts closing.'}
5. {'step': 'Watch the trend, not the snapshot', 'why': 'A single normal glucose does not mean safety. If fasting glucose is creeping from 95 to 105 to 115 over two years, or A1c is rising from 5.7 to 6.0 to 6.4, you are on a downhill slope. A stable number on a bad trajectory is not truly stable—it is compensation about to fail.'}

Domino effect

1. **Insulin resistance starts silently** — Extra weight (especially belly fat), genes, and lack of movement make muscle, fat, and liver cells ignore insulin's signal. Sugar cannot get inside cells, so it piles up in the blood. The pancreas tries to compensate by making extra insulin, so for years your blood sugar looks normal and you feel fine—but damage is already starting in your vessels.
2. **The pancreas wears out** — Beta cells in the pancreas work overtime for months or years, pumping out two to three times the normal insulin. High blood sugar itself poisons these cells (glucotoxicity), and they shrink or die. By the time blood sugar is high enough to diagnose diabetes, you have lost about half your beta cells. Insulin output drops, and blood sugar climbs fast.
3. **Hemoglobin A1c rises and you start to feel symptoms** — When beta cells fail, blood sugar stays high all day. Hemoglobin A1c (a three-month average of blood sugar) climbs above 6.5 percent. High sugar spills into urine, so you pee a lot and lose water (polyuria, excessive thirst (polydipsia)). Cells are starving for fuel even though blood is sweet, so you feel tired. High sugar swells the lens in your eye, making vision blurry.
4. **Small blood vessels get damaged (microvascular disease)** — High blood sugar is thick and sticky. It damages the smallest vessels first—the retina (back of the eye, causing blurry vision and eventually blindness), the glomeruli (filters in the kidneys, causing protein to leak into urine and eventually kidney failure), and the nerves (especially in feet and hands, causing numbness, tingling, and pain called diabetic neuropathy).
5. **Large blood vessels get damaged (macrovascular disease)** — High sugar and high insulin inflame and scar the walls of big arteries (atherosclerosis). Plaques grow in the coronary arteries (heart attack), carotid arteries (stroke), and leg arteries (poor circulation, wounds that will not heal). People with diabetes have two to four times the risk of heart attack and stroke compared to people without diabetes.
6. **The liver keeps making sugar overnight** — Insulin resistance blocks the liver's stop signal, so it keeps releasing stored glucose into the blood all night. You wake up with high fasting sugar (over 126 mg/dL) even if you did not eat. This is why fasting glucose is one of the main tests used to diagnose diabetes.
7. **Acute crises can happen—hyperosmolar hyperglycemic state or severe low blood sugar (hypoglycemia)** — If blood sugar climbs extremely high (over 600 mg/dL), blood becomes syrup-thick, you lose huge amounts of water through urine, and you can become confused or unconscious (hyperosmolar hyperglycemic state, or HHS). If you take too much insulin or a sulfonylurea medication and skip a meal, blood sugar can drop dangerously low (below 70 mg/dL), causing sweating, shaking, confusion, seizures, or coma (severe low blood sugar (hypoglycemia)). Both are medical emergencies.

8. Trace it all back to the one upstream break — Every weird finding—peeing a lot, tired, blurry vision, numb feet, heart attacks—points backward to cells that will not listen to insulin and a pancreas that cannot keep up. The body is not trying to hurt you; it is trying to survive by dumping sugar in urine and releasing stress hormones to keep blood flowing. But this survival mode trades short-term balance for long-term damage. Fix the upstream break—lose weight, move daily, eat fewer refined carbs, take metformin to lower liver sugar output, add SGLT2 inhibitors (which make kidneys dump sugar) or GLP-1 agonists (which help beta cells and slow stomach emptying)—and you stop the dominoes before they knock over your heart, kidneys, eyes, and nerves.

Symptoms · what the patient feels, and why

- Drinking much more water than usual (polydipsia): When sugar builds up in the blood, the kidneys try to flush it out by making more urine. The body loses a lot of water that way, so you feel really thirsty and need to drink more to replace what you lost.
- Peeing a lot more often, especially at night (polyuria): High blood sugar spills into the urine and pulls extra water along with it (like salt pulling water out of a vegetable). The kidneys make much more urine to get rid of the extra sugar, so you have to go to the bathroom more often.
- Feeling tired or worn out most of the time: Insulin is like a key that unlocks the door to let sugar into cells for fuel. In type 2 diabetes, the body's cells don't respond well to insulin (insulin resistance), so sugar stays stuck in the blood instead of getting inside cells. Without enough fuel, your cells and body feel tired.
- Blurry vision: High blood sugar pulls fluid out of the lens of the eye (the clear part that focuses light), changing its shape. That makes it harder to focus clearly, so things look blurry. This usually gets better when blood sugar comes back down.
- Cuts, sores, or infections that heal slowly: High sugar in the blood damages small blood vessels and nerves over time, so less blood (and the oxygen and nutrients it carries) reaches the skin. White blood cells that fight germs also don't work as well when sugar is high. Together, these slow down healing.
- Tingling, numbness, or pain in the hands or feet: Over time, high blood sugar damages the nerves that carry signals from your hands and feet to your brain (peripheral neuropathy). Damaged nerves send mixed-up signals—sometimes numbness, sometimes tingling, sometimes burning pain—or stop sending signals at all.
- Darkened skin patches, especially in the armpits or neck (acanthosis nigricans): When the body has high insulin levels for a long time (because cells are resisting it), the extra insulin makes skin cells grow faster in certain spots. The skin thickens and turns velvety and dark, usually in body folds. This is a visible sign of insulin resistance.

- **Losing weight without trying:** If blood sugar gets very high and cells can't use it for energy, the body starts breaking down muscle and fat for fuel instead. You lose weight even though you're eating normally, because your cells are starving for usable energy.
- **Feeling hungrier than usual, even after eating:** Even though sugar is high in the blood, it's not getting into the cells that need it (because of insulin resistance). Your cells signal the brain that they're low on fuel, so you feel hungry and want to eat more.

Focused exam

- **Fasting blood glucose ≥ 126 mg/dL on two separate tests, or random glucose ≥ 200 mg/dL with symptoms like peeing a lot or feeling very thirsty:** In Type 2 Diabetes, muscle, fat, and liver cells ignore insulin (the key that unlocks the door so glucose can enter), so glucose stays stuck in the blood. This number shows the body's glucose control is broken.
- **Hemoglobin A1c $\geq 6.5\%$ on two tests:** Red blood cells pick up glucose as they travel through the blood; A1c measures how much glucose has stuck to them over the past three months. A1c $\geq 6.5\%$ means blood sugar has been too high for months, not just today—your body has been struggling quietly for a long time.
- **Body mass index (BMI) ≥ 25 , especially extra belly fat:** Fat tissue—especially fat packed around the belly and inside organs—releases chemicals (like tumor tissue death (necrosis) factor-alpha and free fatty acids) that block insulin from working in muscle and liver cells. This insulin resistance is the main root cause in Type 2 Diabetes; the pancreas tries to pump out extra insulin to keep up, but eventually wears out.
- **Blood pressure $\geq 130/80$ mmHg:** Insulin resistance makes the kidneys hold onto extra salt and water, and stiffens blood vessel walls, raising blood pressure. High blood pressure and high blood sugar together damage the small blood vessels in the kidneys, eyes, and nerves faster. Finding one means screen for the other.
- **Urine albumin-to-creatinine ratio ≥ 30 mg/g, or estimated glomerular filtration rate (eGFR) < 60 mL/min/1.73 m²:** High blood sugar damages the tiny filters (glomeruli) in the kidneys; albumin (a protein) leaks into the urine when those filters crack. eGFR measures how much blood the kidneys can clean each minute. Both tests catch kidney damage early—before the patient feels anything—so you can slow or stop it before dialysis becomes necessary.
- **Decreased or absent sensation to 10-gram monofilament on the soles of the feet, or absent ankle reflexes:** High blood sugar over years poisons the long nerves that run to the feet (diabetic peripheral neuropathy). The patient loses feeling and cannot tell when a stone is in the shoe or when skin breaks; small cuts become infected ulcers that can lead to amputation. Catch numbness early.

Diagnostics · every test answers a question

- Hemoglobin A1c → What has the average blood sugar been over the past three months—is the body keeping glucose in the normal range day after day, or is control broken?
- Fasting plasma glucose → After the patient has not eaten for at least eight hours, is the liver still dumping too much glucose into the blood?
- Two-hour oral glucose tolerance test (OGTT) → After drinking 75 grams of pure glucose, can the pancreas release enough insulin—and can the body's cells respond to it—to clear glucose from the blood within two hours?
- Urine albumin-to-creatinine ratio (UACR) → Are the tiny kidney filters leaking protein into the urine—a sign of early diabetic kidney disease?
- Estimated glomerular filtration rate (eGFR), calculated from serum creatinine, age, sex, and race → How much blood can the kidneys filter and clean each minute—are they still doing their job, or is function dropping?
- Lipid panel (total cholesterol, LDL, HDL, triglycerides) → Is the cholesterol profile abnormal—especially high triglycerides and low HDL—which often travels with insulin resistance and raises heart-attack risk?
- Dilated retinal exam (fundoscopy) by an eye specialist → Are the tiny blood vessels in the back of the eye leaking, swelling, or growing abnormally—signs of diabetic retinopathy?

Treatment logic

- Lose 5–10% of body weight through portion control, more vegetables and whole grains, and at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise (like brisk walking) each week → Weight loss shrinks fat cells; they stop releasing the inflammatory chemicals (tumor tissue death (necrosis) factor-alpha, resistin, free fatty acids) that block insulin receptors on muscle and liver cells. Insulin can work again—muscle cells grab glucose, the liver stops overproducing it, and blood sugar drops. Exercise also moves GLUT4 transporters (the doors glucose uses) to the muscle-cell surface even without insulin. This fixes the root cause: insulin resistance.
- Start metformin 500–850 mg once or twice daily with food, then titrate up to 2000–2550 mg/day as tolerated → Metformin turns down glucose production in the liver (it blocks mitochondrial complex I and activates AMP-kinase, which tells the liver 'stop making sugar'), and it makes muscle cells more sensitive to insulin so they pull glucose out of the blood better. It lowers A1c by about 1–2% and does not cause low blood sugar or weight gain.

- Add a GLP-1 receptor agonist (like semaglutide, dulaglutide, or liraglutide) by injection once weekly or daily, especially if the patient is overweight, has heart disease, or needs to avoid weight gain → GLP-1 agonists copy the gut hormone GLP-1 (glucagon-like peptide-1). They make the pancreas release insulin only when blood sugar is high (so you do not get dangerous lows), slow stomach emptying so you feel full longer and eat less (weight drops 5–15 pounds on average), and tell the brain 'you are satisfied, stop eating.' They also reduce heart attacks, strokes, and kidney-disease progression in people with existing heart or kidney problems.
- Add an SGLT2 inhibitor (like empagliflozin, dapagliflozin, or canagliflozin) by mouth once daily, especially if the patient has heart failure, chronic kidney disease (eGFR ≥ 20), or needs to avoid weight gain → SGLT2 inhibitors block a transporter (sodium-glucose cotransporter 2) in the kidney tubules that normally pulls glucose back into the blood; instead, glucose spills into the urine (you pee out 60–80 grams of sugar a day), which lowers blood sugar and causes modest weight loss (3–5 pounds). They also protect the heart (fewer hospitalizations for heart failure) and slow kidney-disease progression even in people without diabetes.
- Start basal insulin (like insulin glargine or degludec) injected once daily at bedtime, titrating the dose until fasting blood sugar is 80–130 mg/dL, when A1c stays $\geq 7\%$ despite metformin, GLP-1, and SGLT2 inhibitor → Basal insulin provides a steady, low level of insulin all day and night (like the pancreas normally does). It stops the liver from dumping glucose into the blood overnight and between meals, lowering fasting blood sugar. It directly forces glucose into muscle, fat, and liver cells—no need for the cells to 'listen' to a broken insulin signal.
- Control blood pressure to $<130/80$ mmHg with an ACE inhibitor (like lisinopril) or ARB (like losartan), start a moderate-intensity statin (like atorvastatin 10–20 mg) to lower LDL cholesterol, and give low-dose aspirin (81 mg daily) if the patient has existing heart disease or is over 50 with one other heart-risk factor → ACE inhibitors and ARBs relax blood vessels (lowering blood pressure) and also protect the kidney filters from high-pressure damage; they cut the risk of kidney failure in half. Statins lower LDL cholesterol and stabilize plaques in artery walls, preventing heart attacks and strokes (the leading cause of death in Type 2 Diabetes). Aspirin thins the blood slightly, lowering clot risk in people with vessel damage.
- Screen feet (monofilament test and visual inspection) every visit, screen eyes (dilated retinal exam) yearly, and check urine albumin and eGFR yearly → Screening catches nerve damage (neuropathy), eye damage (retinopathy), and kidney damage (nephropathy) early—before the patient notices symptoms—when treatment (better glucose control, blood-pressure control, laser therapy for eyes, protective shoes for feet) can still stop or slow the damage.

Medications

Metformin · Biguanide (a class of blood-sugar-lowering pills)

Metformin tells the liver to make less sugar and helps muscle cells grab sugar from the blood more easily. It does not force the pancreas to squeeze out more insulin; instead, it helps the body use the insulin it already has. This keeps blood sugar from climbing too high without pushing it dangerously low.

1. You swallow the pill, and it travels through your stomach into your intestines.
2. The medicine is absorbed into your blood and carried to the liver.
3. Inside liver cells, metformin turns down a chemical switch (an enzyme called AMP-activated protein kinase) that controls sugar-making.
4. The liver slows its production of glucose (sugar) and releases less into the blood.
5. At the same time, muscle cells become more sensitive to insulin and pull more glucose out of the blood to burn for energy.
6. Over hours and days, your blood sugar drops toward a healthier range.

SAFETY WATCH

Upset stomach, loose stools, or nausea when you first start (usually fades in 1–2 weeks; starting with a low dose and taking it with meals helps) · Rare lactic acidosis (acid from oxygen-starved tissues) (a dangerous build-up of acid in the blood) if you have severe kidney or liver disease, so your doctor will check kidney function before prescribing · Stop metformin 48 hours before any imaging test with IV contrast dye (the dye can stress the kidneys) and restart only after kidney function is rechecked · Very rarely, long-term use can lower vitamin B₁₂ levels; your doctor may check B₁₂ yearly

Empagliflozin, canagliflozin, dapagliflozin (examples of SGLT2 inhibitors) · SGLT2 inhibitor (sodium-glucose cotransporter 2 blocker)

These pills make your kidneys dump extra sugar into the urine instead of recycling it back into the blood. By forcing sugar out through urine, blood sugar drops. As a bonus, you lose a little water and salt too, which takes strain off the heart and kidneys. This is why doctors choose SGLT2 inhibitors first for people with type 2 diabetes who also have heart failure or chronic kidney disease.

1. You swallow the pill, and it enters your bloodstream.
2. The medicine travels to the kidneys.
3. In the proximal tubule, it blocks a protein called SGLT2 that normally grabs glucose from the filtered urine and sends it back into the blood.

4. With SGLT2 blocked, glucose stays in the urine and leaves the body when you pee.
5. Your blood sugar drops because sugar is being thrown away instead of recycled.
6. You also pee out a bit more water and sodium, which gently lowers blood pressure and reduces fluid overload in heart failure.

SAFETY WATCH

Yeast infections (vaginal yeast in women, jock itch or penile yeast in men) because sugar in the urine feeds yeast; good hygiene helps · Urinary tract infections (bacteria also like the sugary urine) · Dehydration or dizziness when standing up, especially in hot weather or if you take diuretics (water pills); drink plenty of water · Rare but serious diabetic ketoacidosis (the acid crisis of missing insulin) even when blood sugar is not sky-high (euglycemic DKA); stop the drug and get emergency care if you feel very sick, have belly pain, vomit, or breathe fast · Rare Fournier gangrene (a severe infection of the skin between the legs); see a doctor immediately for pain, redness, or fever in the genital or rectal area · Do NOT use if kidney function is very poor (eGFR below 20–30 depending on the drug)

Semaglutide, dulaglutide, liraglutide (examples of GLP-1 receptor agonists) · GLP-1 receptor agonist (glucagon-like peptide-1 mimic)

These injections copy a natural gut hormone (GLP-1) that your intestines release after you eat. GLP-1 tells the pancreas to make insulin only when blood sugar is rising, slows down how fast your stomach empties, and dials down your appetite in the brain. Because you feel full longer and eat less, most people lose significant weight. GLP-1 agonists also protect the heart, so they are a top choice if you have type 2 diabetes plus heart disease or if you need to lose weight.

1. You inject the medicine under the skin (usually once a week or once a day, depending on the drug).
2. The GLP-1 mimic enters your bloodstream and travels throughout the body.
3. In the pancreas, it binds to GLP-1 receptors on beta cells (the cells that make insulin) and tells them to release insulin—but only when glucose is present, so your sugar doesn't drop too low.
4. It also blocks alpha cells in the pancreas from releasing glucagon (a hormone that tells the liver to dump more sugar).
5. In the stomach, it slows the muscular contractions that push food into the intestine, so you feel full longer.
6. In the brain's hypothalamus, it activates receptors that reduce hunger and increase the feeling of being satisfied after a meal.
7. Over weeks, blood sugar drops, appetite decreases, and body weight falls.

SAFETY WATCH

Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea when starting (usually fades in a few weeks; starting at a low dose and slowly increasing helps) · Rare pancreatitis (serious pancreas inflammation); stop the drug and see a doctor if you have severe, unrelenting belly pain that shoots to your back · Do NOT use if you or a close family member has ever had medullary thyroid cancer or multiple endocrine neoplasia syndrome type 2 (MEN 2), because animal studies showed a thyroid tumor risk · Gallstones (rapid weight loss can trigger them); watch for severe right-upper belly pain · Slowed stomach emptying can delay absorption of other medicines (especially oral contraceptives or antibiotics that need exact timing)

Glargine, degludec, detemir (examples of basal insulin) · Long-acting insulin (basal insulin)

Basal insulin is a slow, steady drip of insulin that mimics what a healthy pancreas releases all day and night to keep blood sugar stable between meals. You inject it once or twice a day, and it works around the clock to let sugar move from blood into cells. Doctors add basal insulin when pills and other injections can no longer keep blood sugar in range, or right away if your sugar is dangerously high at diagnosis.

1. You inject the insulin under the skin of your belly, thigh, or upper arm.
2. The insulin is absorbed slowly and steadily into the bloodstream (special chemical changes make it release over 12-24+ hours).
3. Insulin molecules travel through the blood and latch onto insulin receptors on the surface of liver, muscle, and fat cells.
4. In the liver, insulin tells the cell to stop breaking down stored sugar (glycogen) and releasing it.
5. In muscle and fat, insulin activates glucose transporter proteins (called GLUT4) that move to the cell surface and pull glucose out of the blood.
6. Glucose enters cells to be burned for energy or stored, so blood sugar drops and stays steady.

SAFETY WATCH

Low blood sugar (Hypoglycemia) (blood sugar drops too low) if the dose is too high, you skip a meal, or you exercise hard without adjusting your dose; symptoms include shaking, sweating, confusion, fast heartbeat—treat immediately with 15 grams of fast sugar (juice, glucose tabs) · Weight gain (insulin helps cells store energy) · Injection-site reactions (redness, swelling, or lumps; rotate injection sites to prevent lipohypertrophy) · Never share insulin pens or needles (risk of infection)

Atorvastatin, rosuvastatin (examples of statins) · Statin (HMG-CoA reductase inhibitor)

Statins lower LDL cholesterol (the 'bad' cholesterol that clogs arteries) by blocking the liver's cholesterol factory. High blood sugar damages artery walls, and cholesterol sticks to the damage, building plaques that can cause heart attacks and strokes. Every adult with type 2 diabetes age 40–75 (and many younger or older patients with extra risk) should take a statin to protect the heart and blood vessels, even if cholesterol levels look okay.

1. You swallow the pill, usually at night (the liver makes most cholesterol overnight).
2. The statin enters liver cells.
3. It blocks HMG-CoA reductase, the enzyme that controls the production line for cholesterol.
4. With less cholesterol being made, liver cells pull LDL cholesterol out of the blood to meet their needs.
5. LDL cholesterol in the blood drops, and over months to years, plaques in artery walls shrink or stop growing.
6. The risk of heart attack, stroke, and other artery-clogging events falls.

SAFETY WATCH

Muscle aches or weakness (common but usually mild; tell your doctor if pain is severe or you feel unusually weak) · Rare severe muscle breakdown (rhabdomyolysis) that can harm the kidneys; stop the statin and get emergency care if you have dark urine, severe muscle pain, or extreme weakness · Liver enzyme elevation (your doctor will check blood tests before starting and occasionally afterward) · Small increase in blood sugar in some people (the heart benefit still far outweighs this risk) · Avoid grapefruit juice with some statins (it raises drug levels and increases side effects)

Aspirin (low-dose, 81 mg) · Antiplatelet agent (blood thinner)

Aspirin stops platelets (tiny blood cells that form clots) from clumping together. In people with diabetes, high sugar and inflammation make blood stickier, raising the risk of clots that cause heart attacks and strokes. Low-dose aspirin is recommended for adults with diabetes who have already had a heart attack or stroke (secondary prevention) and may be used for primary prevention in those at high cardiovascular risk (age ≥ 50 with additional risk factors) after weighing bleeding risk.

1. You swallow the small aspirin tablet (81 mg, about one-quarter the dose of a regular pain pill).
2. Aspirin is absorbed into the blood.
3. Inside platelets, it permanently blocks an enzyme called cyclooxygenase-1 (COX-1).

4. COX-1 normally makes thromboxane A₂, a chemical signal that tells platelets to stick together.
5. With COX-1 blocked, platelets cannot make thromboxane and become much less sticky.
6. Blood clots form more slowly, reducing the chance a clot will block an artery in the heart or brain.

SAFETY WATCH

Stomach irritation or ulcers (aspirin can damage the stomach lining); take with food if needed · Bleeding risk (nosebleeds, easy bruising, or dangerous internal bleeding); do NOT use if you have active ulcers, recent bleeding stroke, or severe liver disease · Allergic reactions or asthma worsening in some people · Not for routine use in people at low cardiovascular risk because bleeding risk may outweigh benefit; discuss with your doctor

Lisinopril, enalapril (examples of ACE inhibitors) OR Losartan, valsartan (examples of ARBs) · ACE inhibitor (angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitor) or ARB (angiotensin receptor blocker)

These pills block a hormone system (the renin-angiotensin system) that tightens blood vessels and raises blood pressure. High blood pressure and high blood sugar together damage the tiny filters in the kidneys and the blood vessels throughout the body. ACE inhibitors and ARBs relax blood vessels, lower blood pressure (goal <130/80 in diabetes), and protect the kidneys from further harm. They are the first choice for blood pressure control in diabetes, especially if you already have protein in your urine (a sign of kidney damage).

1. You swallow the pill, and it enters your bloodstream.
2. ACE inhibitors block the enzyme (ACE) that converts angiotensin I into angiotensin II (a powerful vessel-tightening hormone). ARBs block the receptors that angiotensin II binds to on blood vessel walls.
3. Either way, angiotensin II's effects are turned down.
4. Blood vessels relax and widen, so blood pressure falls.
5. In the kidneys, pressure inside the filtering units drops, which reduces the leak of protein into urine and slows the progression of diabetic kidney disease.
6. Over months to years, the risk of heart attack, stroke, and kidney failure decreases.

SAFETY WATCH

Dry cough (common with ACE inhibitors; switch to an ARB if it bothers you) · High potassium (hyperkalemia), especially if you have reduced kidney function; your doctor will check potassium levels · Dizziness or lightheadedness when standing (blood pressure drops) · Rare serious allergic reaction with face or throat swelling (angioedema); stop the drug and get emergency help · Do NOT use during pregnancy (can harm the baby); tell your doctor immediately if you become pregnant · Kidney function may worsen slightly at first (expected and usually safe; your doctor will monitor)

Red flags

- Confusion, extreme sleepiness, or trouble waking up (can mean very high blood sugar or a dangerous complication called hyperosmolar hyperglycemic state)
- Fruity-smelling breath, deep fast breathing, nausea, or vomiting (can mean diabetic ketoacidosis (the acid crisis of missing insulin), though rare in type 2; more common if also low insulin)
- New severe belly pain, especially with nausea or fever (can mean pancreatitis or infection that spreads fast in high sugar)
- Sudden vision loss or severe eye pain (can mean bleeding in the eye or pressure buildup from diabetic eye damage)
- A foot wound or ulcer that won't heal, with redness, warmth, or bad smell (can mean serious infection or loss of blood flow that may lead to amputation if not treated quickly)

Nursing priorities

1. Check blood glucose (blood sugar level) with fingerstick or review recent hemoglobin A1c (a blood test showing average sugar over 3 months) to confirm diagnosis and measure how high sugar is right now — Blood glucose above 126 when fasting or A1c above 6.5 percent confirms diabetes, and very high glucose above 400 may cause diabetic ketoacidosis (the acid crisis of missing insulin) or hyperosmolar state requiring emergency treatment
2. Measure blood pressure and confirm it is below 130 over 80, or notify provider if above this target — High blood pressure damages the kidneys' tiny filters (glomeruli) and causes heart attacks and strokes much faster in diabetes patients, so tight control prevents these complications
3. Calculate body mass index and discuss losing 5 to 10 percent of current weight through eating fewer calories and exercising 150 minutes each week — Weight loss improves insulin resistance by making muscle and fat cells respond better to insulin, often lowering A1c by 0.5 to 2 percent and may even reverse early diabetes

4. Teach how to take Metformin (a pill that lowers liver sugar production) starting at 500 mg once or twice daily with food, and warn about diarrhea and stomach upset that usually improve after 2 weeks — Metformin is the first medicine for type 2 diabetes because it lowers A1c by 1 to 2 percent, does not cause low blood sugar (hypoglycemia), and reduces heart attacks, plus it costs very little
5. Examine both feet for skin breaks, redness, blisters, or calluses, and teach patient to check feet daily and wear shoes at all times — Diabetic neuropathy stops pain signals so patients do not feel cuts or sores, and high sugar impairs white blood cells (infection-fighting cells) so small wounds become infected and lead to amputation
6. Schedule or confirm appointments for dilated eye exam (when drops widen the pupil so doctor sees the retina), urine test for albumin (a protein showing kidney damage), and lipid panel (cholesterol blood test) — Diabetic retinopathy (blood vessel damage in the eye) causes blindness, kidney damage leads to dialysis (machine filtering blood), and high cholesterol causes heart attacks, but catching these early allows treatment before permanent harm
7. Discuss starting a statin (a cholesterol-lowering pill like atorvastatin) if patient is age 40 to 75, because most diabetes patients need this for heart protection — Diabetes increases heart attack and stroke risk by 2 to 4 times, and statins lower bad cholesterol (LDL) and reduce heart attacks by 25 percent even when cholesterol is normal
8. Teach signs of low blood sugar (hypoglycemia) including shakiness, sweating, confusion, and fast heartbeat, and explain to eat 15 grams of fast sugar like juice or glucose tablets if sugar drops below 70 — Metformin alone rarely causes low blood sugar (hypoglycemia) (dangerously low blood sugar), but when we add other medicines or insulin later, low sugar can cause seizures, loss of consciousness, and death if untreated

Sources

- American Diabetes Association Standards of Care 2024
- CDC Diabetes Prevention and Management
- AACE/ACE Comprehensive Type 2 Diabetes Management Algorithm
- ADA/EASD Consensus Report on Type 2 Diabetes Management

Last reviewed: 2026-07-07