

*Patient Education Sheet*

**What You Need to Know About Insulin**

**What is Insulin?**

Insulin is a hormone, which is produced in the body, to help the body move sugar from the blood into the muscles. The muscles need the sugar for energy. The sugar comes from two places: the food you eat turns into sugar after eating, and your liver stores some of the sugar for later use. Twenty-four hours a day, your liver puts out a slow, steady drip of sugar to give you energy when you are not eating.

When you have diabetes, it means that your body is not making enough insulin, or the insulin is not working properly, so the sugar in the blood cannot get into the muscles. The sugar level becomes too high in the bloodstream. Many people with diabetes will need to start taking insulin by injection so the muscles get the energy they need, and the sugar in the blood stays at a healthy level.

**Can I take a pill instead of injecting insulin?**

Insulin does not come in a pill form. You can only get it by injecting it.

**Are there different types of insulin?**

The two types of insulin used most often at our hospital are:

1. Lantus insulin. This is a “slow-acting” insulin that can be injected once or twice every day. It gives a slow, steady drip of sugar that comes from your liver.
2. Humalog insulin. This is a “rapid-acting” insulin that is injected 10-15 minutes before each meal. This insulin helps the body use the sugar that comes from the food at your meal.

People with diabetes may take only one of these insulins, or may take both. Your doctor will decide what is best for you to do, and how much insulin to take.

**Where is insulin injected?**

Insulin is injected into fatty parts of the body on your stomach, upper leg, and upper arm. You are not going to inject it into a vein. Use different spots every day.

**Can insulin hurt me?**

High blood sugars can hurt your body. Insulin helps to keep the blood sugars in a healthy range, to lower your risk of having problems in the future. The only real problem with insulin is you may sometimes feel hypoglycemia.

**What is hypoglycemia?**

“Hypoglycemia” means your blood sugar has dropped too low. This can happen if you take insulin, do not eat enough food, or you skip a meal. It can also happen if you suddenly increase your physical activity. To prevent low blood sugar, always eat your meals on time (do not skip a meal). If you think you will be more active, eat an extra snack for extra energy.

Hypoglycemia can make you feel shaky, sweaty, dizzy, weak, or jittery. Try to

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check your blood sugar to see how low you are. To feel better fast, take 4 ounces of fruit juice, or 6 regular Lifesaver candies (not sugarless), or 8 ounces of low fat milk right away. Check your blood sugar again in 15 minutes to be sure it comes back up. Let your doctor know if this happens a lot. Your insulin dose may need to be reduced.

### **Do I have to keep the insulin cold all the time?**

Insulin comes in the form of a bottle or a pen. The bottle or pen that you are using everyday can stay at room temperature. It does not need to be in the refrigerator, but you must keep it away from heat. For example, do not leave it near the radiator, stove, or microwave oven, and do not leave it where the sun can shine on it. Also, do not leave it in the car. Always carry it with you when you are out. If you go to the beach for the day, carry the insulin in an insulated cold pack. If you have an extra supply of bottles or pens, keep them in the refrigerator until you need to start using one.

### **How long will my supply of insulin last me?**

Lantus and Humalog bottles each have 1000 units of insulin in them.

Lantus and Humalog pens each have 300 units of insulin in them.

A bottle or pen is only good for a month once it is used for the first time. Some people will use up the insulin before the month is over, and will need to start a new bottle or pen from the refrigerator. Some people will have insulin left over at the end of the month if their dose is small.

They must throw the leftover insulin out and start a new bottle or pen from the refrigerator.

### **How do I throw away these supplies?**

The empty insulin bottles or pens can be thrown away in your regular garbage. Be sure the needle is not still attached to the pen.

Syringes and pen needles must be thrown away in a safe container. You can purchase medical “sharps” containers at pharmacies. You can also throw the sharps into a dish detergent or bleach bottle (heavy plastic that you cannot see through). When the bottle is full, screw the cap back on, put tape around the bottle over the cap, and write “do not recycle” on the tape. Put the bottle into your regular garbage.

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Additional information can also be found at our website;

[www.westernconnecticuthealthnetwork.org](http://www.westernconnecticuthealthnetwork.org)