

TYPE 2 DIABETES – WHAT DOES TREATMENT INVOLVE?



Photo: © Image'in – stock.adobe.com

DEAR PATIENT,

Type 2 diabetes is very widespread amongst adults. The characteristic feature of this disease is a persistently elevated blood sugar level. If left untreated, diabetes can damage vessels, nerves and organs. However, if diagnosed and treated early on, damage can be avoided in some cases or its progression halted.

This information leaflet gives you an overview of the goals and options for treating type 2 diabetes.

At a glance: Treating type 2 diabetes

- In consultation with your doctor, agree on personal treatment goals, for instance, for your long-term blood sugar value (*HbA1c*). Depending on your age and state of health, this value should be between 6.5 and 8.5 percent. Blood pressure and blood lipid levels are also important.
- Treatment includes patient education and the readjustment of certain habits such as diet and physical activity. If you stop smoking, this will have a major beneficial impact.
- Medication will be prescribed if your blood sugar level remains high despite changes to lifestyle.

► AGREE TREATMENT GOALS

Before beginning treatment, agree on personal treatment goals with your doctor. There are no steadfast rules. The changes and target values that are right for you depend, amongst other things, on your age, needs and life circumstances. Any other conditions you have, will likewise play a role.

You agree on treatment goals for:

- Lifestyle
- Blood sugar
- Blood lipids
- Weight
- Blood pressure

Think about who could help you to achieve your goals, for instance, your next of kin, friends or a self-help group. Your goals should be checked and, if necessary, adjusted during your treatment.

► TARGET RANGE FOR BLOOD SUGAR LEVELS

The long-term blood sugar value or *HbA1c value* indicates how high your blood sugar level was over the previous 8 to 12 weeks. It can be influenced by diet, physical activity and medication. The ideal level for you depends on your personal situation. Depending on age and treatment goal, it should be between 6.5 and 8.5 percent.

A lower value may be deemed appropriate for someone who is younger and otherwise in good health and who tolerates the treatment well. A higher *HbA1c* value is better for someone with very restricted physical ability and other illnesses.

The aim is to avoid, if possible, secondary damage to the heart, kidneys and nerves. Studies indicate that it is good to reduce a very high blood sugar level. In contrast, lowering an only slightly elevated level probably offers less of a benefit. Furthermore, a particularly strict blood sugar level may be associated slightly more frequently with dangerously low blood sugar (hypoglycaemia). By keeping an eye on your blood pressure and blood lipids, you can also help to avoid the secondary damage caused by diabetes.

▶ Treatment for type 2

▶ TREATMENT

Lifestyle

The basis for every treatment of diabetes is an adjusted lifestyle. This includes physical activity, refraining from smoking and a balanced diet. This may suffice to enable you to achieve your personal HbA1c target value and do without medication.

Medication

If medication is prescribed, health professionals initially recommend tablets with *metformin*. Some people find it helpful to take a combination of diabetes medication from the outset: the active ingredient metformin together with a *gliflozin* or a *glutide*. As such a combination may also have more side-effects, it is not recommended for everyone.

- **You already have a heart condition or have had a heart attack?** You may benefit from taking a combination. In studies this was shown to prevent secondary damage to the heart and kidneys and fatalities.
- **You are at a high risk of having a heart attack?** For instance, severe kidney damage or high blood pressure or high blood lipid values? Then, you may derive minor benefits from a combination. In studies it did indeed prevent a few strokes and damage to the kidneys. Nonetheless, this benefit must be carefully weighed against an elevated risk, for example, of nausea or infections in the genital region.
- **You are not at a high risk of having a heart attack?** Then, it is unlikely that you would benefit from taking a combination. You will then be prescribed metformin initially.

If, despite taking metformin or a combined treatment, your blood sugar levels continue to be persistently high, other medication may be added. This includes *sulfonylureas*, *gliptins* or *insulin*. The suitable active ingredient for you depends, amongst other things, on possible side-effects and interactions with other medication you are taking. Furthermore, you should reach your personal treatment goals if possible without experiencing any side-effects such as hypoglycaemia or weight gain.

▶ WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Talk to your doctor about your ideas and your lifestyle. They are important when planning your treatment.
- In a patient education programme, you can learn how best to achieve your treatment goals.
- Adapt your diet to diabetes. In general, the same recommendations for a wholesome diet apply to people with, as to people without, type 2 diabetes. There's no need for special diabetic products or diabetic foods. If you are obese, losing weight will help.
- Movement and physical activity are also recommended for people with diabetes. Talk to your doctor about which activities would be good for you. Remember that physical activity normally lowers blood sugar. If it falls too much, glucose is helpful.
- Try not to smoke and do not drink too much alcohol.
- Talk about your experiences with other people with diabetes, for instance in a self-help group.

▶ MORE INFORMATION

This Patient information is based on the **National Treatment Guideline for Type 2 Diabetes**: www.leitlinien.de/nvl/diabetes

The Programme for National Treatment Guidelines is funded by the German Medical Association (BÄK), the Association of Statutory Health Insurance Physicians (KBV) and the Working Group of Scientific Medical Societies (AWMF).

Contact to self-help groups

You can find out from NAKOS (national contact and information office for the encouragement and support of self-help groups) where there is a self-help group in your area: www.nakos.de, tel.: 030 3101 8960

The German original version is from 2021.

Responsible for the content:
German Agency for Quality in Medicine (ÄZQ)
Joint institution of BÄK and KBV
Fax: 030 4005-2555
E-mail: patienteninformation@azq.de
www.patienten-information.de
www.azq.de



With the compliments of