



Plain Language Patient Summary

The importance of avoiding treatment delays in type 2 diabetes

Date of summary: December 2020

- This plain language patient summary is intended for a non-clinician audience. It summarizes content from one chapter in the supplement **Type 2 Diabetes 2021**, a collection of articles written for family physicians and other family health care professionals.
- The medicines discussed in this summary are approved to treat type 2 diabetes.

What did this chapter look at?

- Type 2 diabetes is a common condition where the levels of sugar (glucose) in the blood are increased.
- Large clinical trials have shown that tight control of blood sugar levels at an early stage may reduce the risk of developing complications linked to type 2 diabetes.
- Many people with diabetes do not receive treatment changes in time to help them to control their blood sugar levels.
- Only about 1 in 4 people achieve their treatment goals for managing diabetes.

Treatment goals

A1c



less than 7%

Blood pressure



less than
130/80 mm Hg

Cholesterol



less than
100 mg/dL

- These goals include targets for blood pressure, average blood sugar levels over time (called glycated hemoglobin, or A1c), and LDL cholesterol.
- This chapter looks at the importance of avoiding delays to treatment changes in people with type 2 diabetes, and methods for achieving treatment goals.

What complications can occur because of delayed treatment?

- Having high blood sugar levels for a long time can increase the risk of developing other health conditions.
- Early blood sugar control can provide long-lasting protection (up to 10 years) from these health conditions.

Damage to small blood vessels



Kidney damage



Nerve damage



Loss of sight

Damage to large blood vessels



Heart attack



Heart failure



Stroke

Decreased quality of life



Increased health care costs



What factors contribute to treatment delays?



People may:

- Not fully accept that they have type 2 diabetes
- Worry about taking too many medications
- Have concerns about possible side effects, such as weight gain and low blood sugar levels (hypoglycemia)
- Not understand the dangers of not controlling their diabetes
- Have other health issues or problems that prevent them from managing their diabetes
- Consider the cost of the medication too high



Health care professionals may:

- Not realize that they are delaying people's treatment
- Not have enough time to discuss how to manage diabetes during a regular appointment
- Believe that they know what people are thinking about treatment choices, instead of asking questions

How can health care professionals prevent treatment delays in their practice?

- Involve the whole medical team in helping people with type 2 diabetes to achieve their treatment goals.
- Set up appointments to focus on diabetes treatment and discuss other issues at another time.
- Send reminders to people to bring a list of current medications and information from blood sugar meters to their appointments.
- Review all medications with people with type 2 diabetes and ask them if they ever forget to take their medication.
- Schedule a follow-up appointment before the person leaves, with the timing based on their last A1c level.
- Help people with type 2 diabetes to coordinate their care and get reimbursed for their treatment.

How often should people have follow-up appointments?



Every **1-2 months** if A1c more than 9%, until first A1c target is reached

Every **2-3 months** if A1c is 9% or less and not at target

Every **6 months** if A1c is 7% or less on 2 occasions

What are the key take-home points for health care professionals?

- It is important for health care professionals to treat people's diabetes in a timely manner to control glucose levels as early as possible.
- A change in treatment should be considered whenever a person's A1c level is not at their individual target.
- People with type 2 diabetes may need help in coordinating their care to achieve their treatment goals.