

Metformin

(pronounced met – for – min)

Why has metformin been prescribed?

Metformin is a medication usually used to treat diabetes but it is also used off licence to help lose weight. Off licence means using the medication for a use which is outside what it is licensed to treat in the UK. However this does not mean it is unsafe and there is experience of using this medication to reduce and reverse weight gain.

What are the benefits of taking metformin?

It prevents the emergence of diabetes and helps with weight loss.

Are there any precautions with metformin?

Metformin is suitable for most people. As with all medicines, however, there are precautions. Your prescriber will usually check that it is safe to prescribe metformin, but let your prescriber know if any of the following apply to you, as extra care may be needed:

- a) do not take metformin if you have reduced renal (kidney) function or if you have epilepsy, uncontrolled diabetes or suffer from heart or liver trouble or a problem with alcohol.
- b) if you are taking any other medication for diabetes, high blood pressure or asthma. Also, tell your prescriber if you buy any medicine 'over the counter' from a pharmacy or supermarket. Please also tell your prescriber if you take any alternative or complementary medicine such as Chinese herbal medicines.
- c) if you are pregnant, breast feeding, or wish to become pregnant

What is the usual dose of metformin?

The starting dose is usually 500mg after breakfast. This will be increased to 500mg twice a day and then to 500mg three times a day with or after food.

How should metformin be taken?

Metformin is usually taken two or three times a day with or after food. However, you and your prescriber may decide that it is better for you to take the medicine at another time.

What form does metformin come in?

Metformin is available as tablets, liquid and in sachets. The tablets are available as 500mg and 850mg strengths, the liquid as 500mg per 5ml and the sachets as 500mg per sachet.

What should be done if a dose is missed?

If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If you miss a whole day's dose – just carry on as normal with the usual dose the following day. You may experience some unpleasant physical effects if you suddenly stop your medication. If you miss more than a day's dose, speak to your prescriber.

What will happen when metformin is first taken?

Metformin, like many medicines, does not work straight away. For example, it may take several weeks before you notice weight loss. Many people do not experience any side effects. However some people may experience some side effects. We have listed potential side effects in the table below, whether or not they are likely to be short or long-term and what measures can be taken is also described. There are other possible side effects – we have listed only the most important ones. Ask your pharmacist, doctor or nurse if you are worried about anything else that you think might be a side effect. Further information on side effects is available in the official manufacturer's leaflet.

Reporting side effects

The 'Yellow Card' scheme encourages patients to report any side effects that they feel may be caused by their medication. Ask your pharmacist, doctor or nurse for the forms if you wish to report any side effects. Alternatively, telephone 0800 100 3352 or go to www.mhra.gov.uk.

What about alcohol?

It is recommended that people taking metformin should not drink alcohol. Discuss any concerns you may have with your doctor

Is it OK to stop taking metformin when symptoms go away?

You should always discuss with your prescriber any plans you have to reduce or stop any of your prescribed medicines but yes you should be able to stop taking metformin once the desired weight has been lost.

Are there any alternatives to metformin?

Yes, there are alternatives for weight loss, speak to your prescriber about what is available.

Summary of side effects

Side effect	Side effect
<p>Nausea - Common (With or without vomiting)</p> <p>What can be done about it? This should wear off within a few days. Splitting the doses throughout the day and taking the medication with or after food may help. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists.</p> 	<p>Diarrhoea –Common (loose stools)</p> <p>What can be done about it? This should wear off within a few days. Splitting the doses throughout the day and taking the medication with or after food may help. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists.</p> 
<p>Stomach ache - Common</p> <p>What can be done about it? This should wear off within a few days. Splitting the doses throughout the day and taking the medication with or after food may help. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists.</p> 	<p>Loss of appetite - Common</p> <p>What can be done about it? This is usually a side effect but when used for weight loss is the main action. Nothing needs to be done unless weight loss is too much.</p> 
(Other less common) Side effects	How common is it and what can be done about it?
Changes in taste	Uncommon You may experience a metallic taste, see your prescriber if this is causing you problems. The changes to taste should resolve once metformin is stopped.
Lactic acidosis signs of this are vomiting, stomach ache with muscle cramps, difficulty breathing and severe tiredness	Very rare This occurs more frequently in those who drink alcohol and those who have reduced kidney function. Contact your doctor for advice if you experience these symptoms.

Very common = almost everyone affected
Rare = few people affected

Common = many people affected
Very rare = very few or no one affected

Uncommon = some people affected

Disclaimer

This leaflet is to help you understand more about your medication. This is not an official manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet (see <http://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/>). Remember, leaflets like this can only describe some of the effects of medication. You may also find other books or leaflets useful. If you have access to the internet you may find a lot of information there as well, but be careful, as internet based information is not always accurate. If in doubt consult your GP or a health care professional.

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