

Safer insulin use

Do you know the type of insulin you use?

Purpose

This fact sheet explains some actions you can take to help keep you safe while using insulin.

There are many different types and strengths of insulins. Using a type or strength of insulin that does not meet your individual needs can be dangerous. Taking the wrong insulin can result in unexpected blood sugar levels. This can lead to hypoglycaemia (sugar levels too low) or hyperglycaemia (sugar levels too high).^{1,2}

There are three important times when you can check your insulin:

- When it is prescribed by your doctor (check the information on the prescription)
- When it is supplied by your pharmacist (check the information on the dispense label and manufacturer's packaging)
- Before you use insulin (check you are using the right insulin, in the right strength).

Key points

There are many types of insulin products available as different people need different types of insulin. Some insulins act quickly and work for a short time in the body, while other insulins work slowly over a longer period. Your treatment will be tailored to meet your individual needs, including the type of insulin, the strength and dose. Your treatment can also change over time if there are changes in how your body uses insulin and when you are unwell.¹

Why is this important?

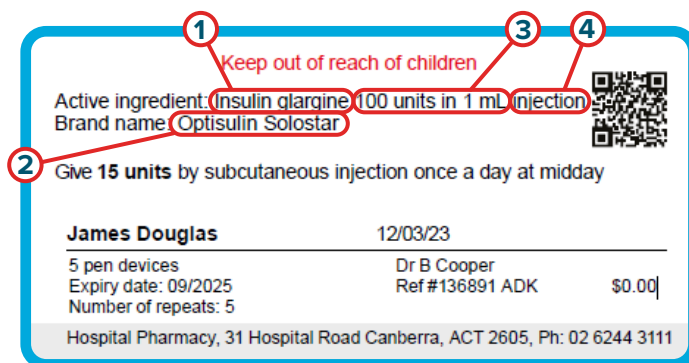
Insulins are available in different strengths and formulations or presentations with medicine names that look and sound similar. This has potential to cause confusion when selecting the correct insulin for prescribing, dispensing and administration. This means that an incorrect insulin could be prescribed or supplied to you by accident.

Further confusion can arise as insulins come in similar looking packaging and delivery devices.³ Checking the insulin is important, especially if it is a new therapy and if you are on more than one type of insulin.²

This information about the insulin can be found on the prescription and dispense label (see Figure 1):

- ① Active ingredient name
- ② Brand name
- ③ Strength with 'units' written in full
- ④ Formulation.

Figure 1: Insulin dispense label example



You can check this information is on the prescription and corresponds with the information from your prescriber and the insulin(s) you are using or expecting to use.

The prescription and dispense label should also carry information on how to use the insulin, how often and when to use, and how much to use.

Always know the insulin brand name

Knowing what type of insulin you are taking is important to ensure ongoing safe and quality use of these medicines.⁴ Medicines are increasingly being prescribed using the active ingredient name, which is safe in most situations and an important part of understanding how to use medicines. However, insulin products can cause confusion. Knowing the insulin brand name, in addition to the active ingredient name and strength, allows you to check you have been prescribed and supplied the correct insulin.

Stop, Think, Check!



Stop and review the active ingredient name, brand name, strength and formulation presentation when you receive an insulin prescription

Insulins have similar looking and sounding names, strengths, and formulations. Knowing the type of insulin you are taking is important for your care.⁵ You should always check the correct active ingredient, brand name, strength and formulation of insulin is on the prescription.

Discuss any concerns or questions with your doctor or pharmacist.



Think about what you know about your insulin therapy

Do you feel confident that you know everything you need to know about your insulin therapy? For instance:

- Is this a new insulin for you?
- Do you know the active ingredient name and brand name of the insulin?
- Do you know what the delivery device (pen or syringe) looks like and how to administer correctly?
- Do you know what dose to use, how often and at what time?



Check the correct brand name has been dispensed and check the brand name before administering

Insulins have similar looking packaging and delivery devices. You should always check the right brand of insulin has been dispensed to you by the pharmacy and instructions for use are clear on the dispensed label.

Check you have the right brand of insulin in the right strength before administering. This is particularly important when it is a new or changed therapy, or if you are on more than one type of insulin.⁴

If you have any concerns, check with your doctor or pharmacist.

Questions

For more information, please visit:

[safetyandquality.gov.au/our-work/medication-safety](https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/our-work/medication-safety).

You can also contact the Medication Safety team at:

medsafety@safetyandquality.gov.au.

References

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