

Chlorpropamide

Why should I use this medication?

- You should only use chlorpropamide if you are unable to take any other medication available for diabetes. Chlorpropamide is one of the original medications developed in a class called sulfonylureas. It is rarely used anymore because of its higher risk for side effects, which include high blood pressure and eye problems. Far better drugs are now available for the treatment of diabetes.
- If your doctor has prescribed chlorpropamide, you will find that it will lower your blood sugars, make you feel better, and decrease your risk of complications from diabetes.
- Taking chlorpropamide and/or other medications is only one part of a 3 point plan in the battle against diabetes. You should also make positive lifestyle changes and manage stress.

How will it make my life better?

- At first you may experience some side effects. These could last for a month or two and then gradually lessen. It's in the long run where you get the pay back for diligently taking this drug. When taken as prescribed, chlorpropamide will lower your blood sugar and, as a result, cut your risk of eye, kidney and/or nerve problems by approximately 25%.



How do I know it's working?

This medication should start to work right away but you may not experience the full effect for a couple weeks.

You can tell if the drug is working by:

1. Checking your blood sugar on a regular basis. If the drug is working, you should start to see the numbers decrease. This medication typically reduces blood sugar by 1-2 units (mmol/l), although some people have reported a reduction of up to 4 units. Your own results depend on many things so it's not possible to say for sure how well this drug will work for you.

Example: If your blood sugar in the morning is typically around 11 mmol/l, you may see a decrease to 7-9 mmol/l.

2. You start to feel better. Once your blood sugars come down, you'll feel less tired and not so thirsty all the time. You'll also stop going to the bathroom so often.

Your doctor or healthcare provider can tell if the drug is working by:

1. Reviewing your day to day blood sugars with you (it is very helpful if you can jot down your numbers on a regular basis and bring them with you to the clinic).
2. Ordering a blood test called your Hemoglobin A1C. Your A1C is the best "big picture" test for blood sugar control. It looks at your blood sugar control over the last 2 to 3 months. Chlorpropamide typically lowers this number by 1-2 %.

Dr. Mike's Key Points

- Your body without diabetes does an amazing job of balancing insulin and sugar in your bloodstream. When you skip a meal and your sugar goes down, the body reduces insulin output to keep the balance. Chlorpropamide is a sulfonylurea and it works by continually stimulating your pancreas to make more insulin. So you can run into trouble if you skip a meal as chlorpropamide is still pushing out the insulin and therefore your blood sugar goes too far down. The bottom line is, as Dr. Christine points out, that you need to put more of an emphasis on eating regularly when you take chlorpropamide or you will end up with blood sugar levels that are too low.

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Is there any reason why I shouldn't take this drug?

You should not use this drug if you are allergic to it or to other similar drugs called sulfonylureas (e.g. tolbutamide, gliclazide, glimepiride, glyburide). This drug is only to be used in the treatment of type-2 diabetes. It should not be used and will not work if you have type-1 diabetes. Before taking this medication, tell your doctor specifically if you have or have ever had:

- kidney disease or lactic acidosis
- an allergic reaction to sulfa-like drugs (e.g. Septra, sulfamethoxazole) – there is a slight chance that you may have an increased risk of an allergic reaction.
- low blood sugar (hypoglycemia)
- difficulty eating 2-3 meals per day
- problems with the liver
- thyroid problems
- high blood pressure

What about possible side effects?

The most common side effects to chlorpropamide are low blood sugar (hypoglycemia) and weight gain (greater than 4 kg/9lbs). Low blood sugar is seen in up to 20% of patients and most people who take chlorpropamide will experience at least some weight gain.

Both side effects are related to the dose that is prescribed but the frequency and severity of low blood sugar is often dependent on other factors such as age, diet, exercise, alcohol and other drugs or medical conditions.

Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about whether you have any risk factors that may make you more sensitive to low blood sugar.

Other side effects that occur less often are:

- rash (fewer than 2% of people)
- increased sensitivity to the sun
- nausea and heartburn (fewer than 2% of people – usually related to higher doses and should go away over time.)

Rare cases (fewer than 0.1% of people) of hepatitis (inflammation of the liver) and jaundice (yellowing of skin and eyes) have been reported. Call your doctor if you experience unexplained nausea, vomiting, stomach pain, fatigue, loss of

- appetite, dark urine, yellowing of the skin and/or eyes
- low sodium in the blood (rare)
- high blood pressure
- low white blood cells in the blood (rare)

This is not a complete list of side effects. If you are concerned about these or other unusual symptoms while taking this medication, ask your doctor and/or pharmacist for more information and advice.

What if I am taking other drugs?

Although there are potential interactions with other medications, many of these may not be significant and can be managed by closer monitoring of your blood sugar and by discussing any changes with your healthcare provider.

Always provide your doctor with a list of all other drugs you are taking (including over-the-counter medications and herbal/natural products) as they may interact with and may change the safety or effectiveness of either drug. Tell your doctor specifically if you are taking any of these drugs as he/she may need to make changes or check you more closely:

- Prednisone, dexamethasone, cortisone, high dose hydrochlorothiazide (greater than 25mg), albuterol, pseudoephedrine, olanzapine, risperidone, niacin. (These drugs may increase your blood sugar and reduce the effectiveness of chlorpropamide).
- Warfarin
- Other diabetes medications (i.e. metformin, insulin, rosiglitazone, pioglitazone, repaglinide, nateglinide, acarbose)
- Rifampin (may decrease effectiveness of chlorpropamide)
- Sulfamethoxazole (e.g. Septra)
- ASA & other anti-inflammatories (e.g. ibuprofen, voltaren, diclofenac)
- Gemfibrozil (may increase the effect of glyburide)
- Cimetidine
- Fenugreek, licorice, bitter melon, eucalyptus, ginseng, St. John's Wort
- Ciprofloxacin or other similar quinolone antibiotics
- Atenolol, metoprolol, propranolol and other beta-blockers. (These may reduce your ability to recognize symptoms of low blood sugar)

This is not a complete list of drug interactions. Ask your doctor or pharmacist to review your list of medications.

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Dr. Christine's Pharmacist Tips:

- If you are given a prescription for this medication, you should ask yourself if you have tried all other appropriate medications first. If the answer is "no", then you should talk to your doctor about a different medication since this one is rarely used anymore.
- Do not drink alcohol while taking this medication as it may cause side effects such as nausea, vomiting, flushing, sweating, headache, heart palpitations.
- It is very important to eat 2-3 meals daily while taking this medication. If you don't eat, you may have a greater chance of having low blood sugars. If you find it difficult to maintain a steady intake of food, talk to your doctor or pharmacist as there are other medications that may be better suited for your lifestyle.
- Many people suggest that this medication should be taken 30 minutes before a meal. Although you can do this, the most important thing is that it is taken around the same time every day.
- Since your skin may burn more easily while taking this medication, you should use sunblock and protective clothing to protect yourself.
- If you do develop symptoms of low blood sugar (shaking hands, fast heartbeat, sweating, confusion, dizziness, feeling hungry, feeling tired and drowsy) then take any of the following:
 - 3 glucose tablets, 6 life-savers, 3 teaspoons or packets of tablet sugar in water, 3/4 cup juice.
 - Re-check your blood sugar again in 15 minutes, if it is still under 4mmol/l then repeat the above.
 - Once your blood sugar is normalized (but not too high), you should have a small snack or a meal if it is near the normal time for this. This will help prevent another low blood sugar episode.
- This medication may not work as well if you are sick. You may have a greater likelihood of low blood sugar if you have diarrhea, vomiting or can't eat because of illness. It is best to check your blood sugars more often when you are sick. Call your doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions.



The maximum total dose of this medication is usually 500 mg per day. If you have not seen an improvement in your blood sugars after one month of being at your current dose, then you should go see your doctor. He/she may need to make changes.

Dr. Mike's Key Points

- We tend to especially use this type of drug in people who are lean.
- If you are like most of my patients, you don't really like taking medications. Taking pills is easier when you can see an immediate benefit. For example, if you take a pill for arthritis, you feel better within an hour. Taking chlorpropamide lowers your overall blood sugar levels (and therefore your A1C) but you may not feel all that different. But make no mistake; lowering your A1C is critical for your long term quality of life.
- Think of taking medications to lower your blood sugar like an investment: it requires some effort and commitment but it will provide large returns in the long run.