

Diabetes and Your Heart: Questions and Answers About Your Diabetes Medications

How does diabetes affect my heart or other important organs?

Having diabetes can increase your risk of damage to your heart, brain and kidneys. The more uncontrolled your blood sugar is, the greater the risk for damage to these important organs. The damage to the heart result in heart attacks or heart failure, which is a condition where the heart can't pump as well as it needs to. The brain could be damaged due to a stroke. Finally, the kidneys could progressively lose the ability to filter the blood. Fortunately, some medicines that can help you control your sugar, can also help you to prevent damage to your heart, brain and kidneys.

Will diabetes medications hurt my heart?

Most diabetes medications have been proven to be safe for the heart. The medications called GLP-1 receptor agonists (ex: dulaglitide, also known as Trulicity®) have been shown to be safe for the heart. The SGLT-2 inhibitors (ex: dapagliflozin, also known as Farxiga®) are also safe. Certain drugs in the group called the DPP-4 inhibitors, linagliptin (also known as Tradjenta®) and sitagliptin (also known as Januvia®) are safe. However, other drugs in this group, saxagliptin (also known as Onglyza®) and alogliptin (also known as Nesina®) have been shown to increase the chances of having to go to the hospital with heart failure. The good news is that all diabetes medications must be studied in a way to ensure that they are safe for the heart before they can be approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

I had a heart attack; will my diabetes medications help my heart?

There are two types of diabetes medicines that can not only lower your blood sugar but can also help prevent you from having a heart attack or stroke in the future. These medicines include the GLP-1 receptor agonists and the SGLT-2 inhibitors. If you are not on these medications and your blood sugar needs to be better controlled, your doctor could add one of these to reduce your heart risk. Your doctor could also decide to use one of these medications in addition to your other diabetes medicines, even if your blood sugar is well controlled, since there isn't much risk of your sugar going too low.

My doctor just told me I now have heart failure; do I need to stop my diabetes medications?

If you are currently taking saxagliptin (also known as Onglyza®) or alogliptin (also known as Nesina®) for diabetes, you should talk to your doctor about stopping these medications, because they increase the risk of going to the hospital with heart failure symptoms. If you need to stop one of these medicines, you will likely need a new diabetes medicine to control your blood sugar.

Fortunately, there are several medication groups like the DPP4 inhibitors and the GLP-1 receptor agonists, that are proven to be safe in patients with heart failure. All of the SGLT-2 inhibitors are

actually beneficial in patients with heart failure, making it less likely that you will have to go to the hospital for worsened heart failure.

My doctor says my kidneys aren't working well because of my diabetes, will medications help?

Fortunately, we know that most medications used for diabetes won't hurt your kidneys. The DPP-4 inhibitors, the GLP-1 receptor agonists and the SGLT-2 receptor agonist ertugliflozin (also known as Steglatro[®]) have no bad effects on your kidneys. One of the GLP-1 receptor agonists, dulaglutide (also known as Trulicity[®]) may slow the worsening of your kidney function. The SGLT-2 inhibitors, dapagliflozin (also known as Farxiga[®]), empagliflozin (also known as Jardiance[®]) and canagliflozin (also known as Invokana[®]) all may slow the worsening of your kidney function as well.