Understanding insulin: A guide to optimizing diabetes treatment.

Stepni Hunk*

Department of Internal Medicine, Medical Faculty of Charles University & University Hospital, Pilsen

Introduction

Diabetes is a chronic condition that affects millions of people worldwide, impacting how the body processes glucose, the primary source of energy. Insulin, a hormone produced by the pancreas, plays a central role in regulating blood sugar levels. For individuals with diabetes, understanding insulin and its role in treatment is crucial to managing the condition effectively. This guide will explore what insulin is, how it works in the body, and how to optimize its use in diabetes treatment [1].

Insulin is a hormone secreted by the beta cells of the pancreas, an organ located behind the stomach. Its primary function is to help the body utilize glucose, which is derived from food. When we eat, carbohydrates are broken down into glucose, which enters the bloodstream. Insulin facilitates the uptake of glucose into cells, where it is either used immediately for energy or stored in the liver and muscles for later use. Without sufficient insulin, glucose accumulates in the bloodstream, leading to high blood sugar levels, or hyperglycemia [2].

In people with Type 1 diabetes, the immune system mistakenly attacks and destroys the insulin-producing beta cells, leading to little or no insulin production. In Type 2 diabetes, the body becomes resistant to insulin, meaning it does not use it effectively, or the pancreas does not produce enough insulin. Both conditions require careful management of blood sugar levels, often with the help of insulin therapy [3].

This insulin type starts working within 15 minutes of injection and lasts for 3 to 5 hours. It is typically used before meals to manage the rise in blood sugar that occurs after eating. Examples include insulin lispro (Humalog) and insulin aspart (NovoLog) [4].

Also known as regular insulin, this type takes about 30 minutes to begin working and lasts for 6 to 8 hours. It is often used before meals but requires more careful timing compared to rapid-acting insulin.This insulin has a slower onset and longer duration. It begins working within 1 to 2 hours and can last up to 12 to 18 hours. NPH insulin is an example of this type [5].

Designed to provide a steady release of insulin throughout the day, long-acting insulin begins working several hours after injection and can last up to 24 hours. Insulin glargine (Lantus) and insulin detemir (Levemir) are examples.This is a combination of short-acting and intermediate-acting insulin in a single injection. It offers convenience for people who need both types of insulin but doesn't allow for as much flexibility in dosing [6].

Effectively using insulin is essential for maintaining blood sugar levels within a healthy range. Below are several strategies for optimizing insulin use in diabetes treatment:Since diabetes is a highly individual condition, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to insulin therapy. Work closely with a healthcare provider to develop a regimen that suits your lifestyle, preferences, and medical needs. This could involve multiple daily injections or the use of an insulin pump for more precise dosing [7].

Regular blood sugar monitoring is essential to understanding how insulin is working and making adjustments as needed. Continuous glucose monitors (CGMs) can provide real-time data on blood sugar levels, helping to guide insulin adjustments throughout the day [8].

Exercise and diet play a significant role in insulin needs. Physical activity can lower blood sugar levels, which may require adjustments to insulin doses before and after exercise. Similarly, meal planning is crucial, as the type and quantity of food consumed affect how insulin is utilized. Rapid-acting insulin is typically used to manage the rise in blood sugar after eating.

Many people with Type 2 diabetes experience insulin resistance, where the body's cells become less responsive to insulin. In such cases, additional treatments such as oral medications or other injectable therapies might be used alongside insulin to improve insulin sensitivity [9].

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Conclusion

Insulin is a vital component in the management of diabetes, whether you have Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes. By understanding the different types of insulin, their action times, and how to

*Correspondence to : Stepni Hunk, Department of Internal Medicine, Medical Faculty of Charles University & University Hospital, Pilsen. E-mail: stp@hnk

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adjust doses based on individual needs, you can optimize your insulin therapy. Regular blood sugar monitoring, tailored treatment plans, and an awareness of lifestyle factors are key to effectively managing diabetes. With the right approach and medical support, people with diabetes can lead healthy, active lives while maintaining stable blood sugar levels.

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