Intermountain® Healthcare

Diabetes Medications: *Glitazones*

What are glitazones?

Glitazone medications — sometimes called thiazolidinediones — are used to treat type 2 diabetes. They're taken by mouth (orally) as a pill.

Glitazones work best when you're following the rest of your diabetes treatment plan. This means checking your blood glucose regularly, following your meal plan, and exercising every day. It may also include taking other diabetes medications.

What do they do?

Glitazones lower your blood glucose (blood sugar). They do this in two ways:

- **They increase the ability of your muscles to use glucose for energy.** As more glucose is used, more glucose leaves your bloodstream.
- **They decrease the amount of glucose released by your liver.** Less glucose enters your bloodstream.

Why is this medication important for my health?

Glitazones can't cure your diabetes. But by helping control your blood glucose, they lower the chance that your diabetes will cause serious problems.

As you know, when you have diabetes, you tend to have high blood glucose. Over time, this can damage your blood vessels and nerves, leading to heart attack or stroke, kidney and eye disease, and problems with your teeth, feet, and skin. If you have high blood pressure or high cholesterol — like many people with diabetes — you have an even greater risk for these problems. (This is why you should always take your blood pressure or cholesterol medications as well as your diabetes medications.)

A common glitazone medication is **pioglitazone** (**Actos**). Like other diabetes medications, glitazones work best when you follow the rest of your diabetes treatment plan.

Do they cause hypoglycemia (low blood glucose)?

Glitazones don't cause hypoglycemia by themselves. But combined with other medications, vigorous exercise, or not eating enough, they can make your blood glucose drop too low.

Since low blood glucose can be dangerous, make sure that you and your family know the symptoms. These include feeling **shaky, sweaty, hungry**, and **irritable.** If you have these symptoms, test your blood glucose and take some quick-acting sugar if it is low. Good sources are 3 or 4 glucose tablets, a half-cup of fruit juice or regular soda, or a tablespoon of honey or sugar.

Guidelines for taking glitazones

You should always follow your doctor's specific instructions for taking any medication, including glitazones. But there are some general rules that will probably apply to you:

- **If you don't notice a change in your blood glucose right away,** don't stop taking your glitazone medication. It takes about 8 weeks for this type of medication to reach its full effect.
- **If your symptoms go away or you decide you feel fine now,** don't stop taking your glitazone medication. You need it to stay well.
- **If you forget to take your glitazone dose,** follow these guidelines:
  - **For once-a-day dosing:** if you miss a dose, take it as soon as you can. If it's almost time for the next day's dose, skip the missed dose and take your next dose as usual. Do NOT double your dose.
  - **For twice-a-day dosing:** if you miss a dose, take it as soon as you can. Then take your next dose at the normal time. Do NOT double your dose.
- **If you don't follow your meal plan** — for example, you overeat, skip a meal, or make a poor food choice, don't adjust your dose.
- **If you're sick,** most of the time you should keep taking your glitazone medication as prescribed. Just check your blood glucose more often — about every 4 hours. Call your doctor for specific instructions if your blood glucose goes out of your target range.
- **If you're taking birth control pills,** talk to your doctor. Glitazones can keep the pills from working properly. Your doctor can discuss options with you.
- **If you plan to become pregnant,** talk to your doctor. Glitazones usually aren't used during pregnancy. Your doctor will work with you to find other ways to help you control your blood glucose during pregnancy.

What are the side effects?

Common side effects from glitazones include weight gain and fluid buildup in the legs and eyes. Less common side effects are sinus and respiratory infections, headaches, muscle pain, and mouth or throat pain. Some of these side effects are more likely when you first start taking a glitazone and may go away on their own.

Are there risks?

Yes. Glitazones have been associated with increased risk for some serious conditions. These include:

- Liver damage. To check for liver damage, your doctor will give you regular blood tests. With good treatment, liver damage can usually be reversed.
- Heart problems. Glitazones can cause or worsen heart failure, a condition in which your heart can't pump enough blood to meet your body's needs.
- Bone fractures in women. Glitazones have not been shown to increase the risk of bone fractures in men.
- Bladder cancer.

Your doctor can discuss these risks with you, weighing them against the potential benefits of using a glitazone medication or a different medication.

When to call or see your doctor

- You're thinking about stopping your medication. (Never stop without talking to your doctor first.)
- You're ill and having trouble controlling your blood glucose.
- You have side effects that don't go away.
- You gain 3 or more pounds in two weeks. (Although weight gain is a common side effect, this kind of rapid, significant weight gain isn't normal.)
- If you plan to become pregnant. Glitazones usually aren't used during pregnancy.

Call your doctor right away if you have any symptoms of liver damage such as vomiting, stomach pain, loss of appetite, dark urine, or yellowish skin.

My medication (name): _____

Strength (mg per pill): _____

How much to take / when to take: _____

_____

Other instructions: _____

_____

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