

## Acarbose for diabetes

Take acarbose at the beginning of a meal. The tablets can be chewed with your first mouthful of food, or swallowed with a drink of water.

The most common side-effect is wind (flatulence).

Remember to follow any advice you have been given about your diet.

### About acarbose

Type of medicine	A glucosidase inhibitor antidiabetic medicine
Used for	Diabetes mellitus (in adults)
Available as	Tablets

Insulin is a hormone that is made naturally in your body, in the pancreas. It helps to control the levels of sugar in your blood. If your body does not make enough insulin, or if it does not use the insulin it makes effectively, this results in the condition called [diabetes \(diabetes mellitus\)](#).

People with [diabetes](#) need treatment to control the amount of sugar (glucose) in their blood. This is because good control of blood sugar levels reduces the risk of complications later on. Some people can control the sugar in their blood by making changes to the food they eat but, for other people, medicines like acarbose are given alongside the changes in diet.

Acarbose works by slowing down the digestion and absorption of carbohydrates from your digestive system. This helps to reduce the high blood sugar levels which occur after eating meals.

## Before taking acarbose

Some medicines are not suitable for people with certain conditions, and sometimes a medicine may only be used if extra care is taken. For these reasons, before you start taking acarbose it is important that your doctor knows:

- If you are pregnant, trying for a baby or breastfeeding.
- If you have any problems with the way your liver works or with the way your kidneys work.
- If you have a hernia or if you have recently had surgery on your tummy (abdomen).
- If you have inflammatory bowel disease.
- If you are taking any other medicines. This includes any medicines you are taking which are available to buy without a prescription, as well as herbal and complementary medicines.
- If you have ever had an allergic reaction to a medicine.

## How to take acarbose

- Before you start the treatment, read the manufacturer's printed information leaflet from inside the pack. It will give you more information about acarbose tablets and will provide you with a full list of the side-effects which you may experience from taking them.
- Take acarbose exactly as your doctor tells you to. There are two strengths of tablet – 50 mg and 100 mg. It is usual to be started on one 50 mg tablet a day to begin with. Your dose will gradually be increased, as needed, up to a maximum dose of 200 mg three times daily. Increasing your dose gradually like this will help to minimise the risk of side-effects.
- Swallow the tablet with a drink of water at the beginning of a meal, or if you prefer, you can chew the tablet with your first mouthful of food.

- If you forget to take a dose, do not worry, just take your next dose when it is due. Do not take two doses together to make up for a forgotten dose, and do not take the tablets between meals.

## Getting the most from your treatment

- It is important that you keep your regular doctor's and clinic appointments. This is so your progress can be monitored. You are likely to need regular check-ups with an eye clinic and a foot clinic as well as with your doctor and diabetes clinic.
- Your doctor may recommend that you test for sugar in your blood or urine regularly to check that your diabetes is being controlled. Your doctor or diabetes nurse will show you how to do this.
- If you have been given advice by your doctor about changes to your diet, stopping smoking or taking regular exercise, it is important for you to follow the advice you have been given.
- Check with your doctor before taking up any new physical exercise, as this will have an effect on your blood sugar levels and you may need to check your blood or urine levels more regularly.
- Do not drink alcohol as it can affect the control of your blood sugar. Ask your doctor if you need further advice about this.
- If you are due to have an operation or dental treatment, you should tell the person carrying out the treatment that you have diabetes and that you are taking acarbose.
- If you get unusually thirsty, pass urine more frequently, and feel very tired, then let your doctor know. These are signs that there is too much sugar in your blood and your treatment may need adjusting.
- Make sure you know what it feels like if your blood sugar is too low. This is known as hypoglycaemia, or a 'hypo'. The first signs of hypoglycaemia are feeling shaky or anxious, sweating, looking pale, feeling hungry, having a feeling that your heart is pounding (palpitations), and feeling dizzy. If these happen you should eat or drink something containing glucose straightaway. Your pharmacist will be able to recommend a suitable glucose preparation for you.

- If you are a driver you should take special care, as your ability to concentrate may be affected if your diabetes is not well-controlled. Make sure you know what it feels like if your blood sugar is low. You may be advised to check your blood or urine glucose levels before you travel and to have a snack with you on long journeys.
- Treatment for diabetes is usually lifelong. Continue to take the tablets unless you are advised otherwise by your doctor.
- If you buy any medicines, check with a pharmacist that they are suitable for you to take.

## Can acarbose cause problems?

Along with their useful effects, most medicines can cause unwanted side-effects although not everyone experiences them. The table below contains some of the most common ones associated with acarbose. You will find a full list in the manufacturer's information leaflet supplied with your medicine. The unwanted effects often improve as your body adjusts to the new medicine, but speak with your doctor or pharmacist if any of the following continue or become troublesome.

<b>Very common acarbose side-effects (these affect more than 1 in 10 people)</b>	<b>What can I do if I experience this?</b>
Wind (flatulence), tummy (abdominal) cramp	These often occur during the first few days but usually settle. If either continues or becomes severe, let your doctor know
<b>Common acarbose side-effects (these affect fewer than 1 in 10 people)</b>	<b>What can I do if I experience this?</b>
Diarrhoea, abdominal pain	Avoid sugar and sucrose-containing foods. Drink plenty of water to replace lost fluids

If you experience any other symptoms which you think may be due to the medicine, speak with your doctor or pharmacist for further advice.

## How to store acarbose

- Keep all medicines out of the reach and sight of children.
- Store in a cool, dry place, away from direct heat and light.

## Important information about all medicines

If you buy any medicines check with a pharmacist that they are safe to take with your other medicines.

Never take more than the prescribed dose. If you suspect that you or someone else might have taken an overdose of this medicine, go to the accident and emergency department of your local hospital. Take the container with you, even if it is empty.

This medicine is for you. Never give it to other people even if their condition appears to be the same as yours.

Do not keep out-of-date or unwanted medicines. Take them to your local pharmacy which will dispose of them for you.

If you have any questions about this medicine ask your pharmacist.

If you experience side effects, you can report them online through the [Yellow Card website](#).

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## Further reading

- [Manufacturer's PIL, Acarbose 50 mg and 100 mg tablets](#); Glenmark Pharmaceuticals Europe Ltd, The electronic Medicines Compendium. Dated August 2016.
- [Medicines Complete BNF 87th Edition](#); British Medical Association and Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, London.

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