

Inhalable Insulin Is On The Way

The world's first inhalable insulin should be on pharmacy shelves sometime this summer, offering adults with diabetes a new way to take a treatment that for more than 80 years has been accessible only through needles.

Exubera was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in January. It has been developed by Pfizer Inc., and Nektar Therapeutics.

Exubera is a meal-time insulin in powdered form that you would take no more than 10 minutes before eating. To use it, you insert a capsule of the insulin into the Exubera Inhaler, pump the handle, and press a button. The insulin is released from the capsule and forms a cloud in the inhaler, and you inhale the insulin by drawing a regular breath through your mouth. The inhaler doesn't require batteries or electricity, weighs about 4 ounces, and is about the size of an eyeglass case when closed.

By the time Exubera is available midyear, your health care provider will know how to train you in using it, says



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Pfizer spokesperson Rebecca Hamm. "We will be putting into place a comprehensive education program for health professionals. Then there will be a program for patients."

If you have type 1, you may use Exubera in place of meal-time injections of rapid-acting insulin, but you would still have to take injections of longer-acting insulin. If you have type 2, you may use Exubera as an alternative to diabetes pills or meal-time insulin injections, or in combination with pills or longer-acting injectable insulin. Whether you have type 1 or type 2, you'll still need to check your blood glucose regularly.

The potential side effects of Exubera include low blood glucose, dry mouth, chest discomfort, and decreased lung capacity. In clinical trials, some users experienced a dry cough immediately after taking the drug. The longer they used the drug, the less they experienced the cough.

If you have lung disease (including asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or emphysema), smoke, or have quit smoking less than 6 months ago, you shouldn't take Exubera. Your doctor should test your lungs before prescribing this drug for you. After that, he or she should test your lungs again 6 months later and once a year after that.

Pfizer is still testing the product in children.

As *Forecast* went to press, Pfizer had not released the cost of Exubera, nor was it clear whether it would be covered by insurance plans and Medicare. "Given the medical need, we expect that there will be coverage," says Hamm.

You can register to get more information about Exubera directly from Pfizer by calling 1-800-398-2372. Or, check out www.exubera.com or www.pfizer.com.

—Terri D'Arrigo