Glitazone Drugs for type 2 diabetes
Actos and Avandia

What are glitazone drugs?
Diabetes pills in this category are also called thiazolidinediones. They’re intended to help lower blood sugar and reduce the risk of diabetes-related complications.

The very first drug in this group, Rezulin, was taken off the market because it was considered unsafe. A study of newer drugs in this group, Actos (pioglitazone) and Avandia (rosiglitazone,) also found that they might be more harmful than helpful.

Does Group Health recommend Actos or Avandia?
Studies of Actos and Avandia showed that they reduce overall blood sugar levels by a very small amount. However, even though these drugs can help lower blood sugar, there’s no research showing that they can help stop complications of Type 2 diabetes.

Group Health doesn’t recommend, nor do we cover the cost of, either Actos or Avandia because of the risks involved in taking these medicines.

Why are Actos and Avandia considered unsafe?
Several studies have found that side effects from taking Actos and Avandia can include:

- Swelling in the feet, legs, hands, and arms
- Blood sugar levels dropping too low
- Weight gain
- Higher cholesterol levels
- Greater risk of bone fractures
- Risk for heart failure
- Increased risk of heart attacks in the future

What does Group Health Recommend?
- Control your blood sugar levels

Together, you and your doctor will set a goal for your blood sugar levels and develop a plan to help you achieve and maintain that goal. Your doctor might also show you how to check your own blood sugar and ask you to have lab tests from time to time.
☐ Take diabetes medicine, if your doctor prescribes it

Your doctor might prescribe other diabetes pills such as Metformin. Metformin is the only medication used to lower blood sugars that and also lowers the risk for heart disease.

At some point, your doctor might recommend that you start to take insulin to gain even better control. For many people, taking insulin is right step to help them gain even better control of blood sugar levels.

☐ Don’t use tobacco

If you use tobacco, quit. Quitting tobacco is one of the most important things you can do for your health. For information on programs available to help you quit, call the Quit For Life® Program toll-free 1-800-462-5327.

☐ Control your blood pressure

Controlling high blood pressure is an important part of lowering your risk of heart attack and stroke. People with diabetes should aim for a blood pressure reading of 129/79 or lower. Your doctor might recommend medicine, physical activity, weight control, or a combination of all of these to help you keep your blood pressure under control.

☐ Talk to your doctor about other medicines

In addition to taking medicine to control blood sugar, your doctor may suggest that you take other medicines to lower your risk for heart disease and other health problems that are more common in people with diabetes.

Group Health recommends the following for patients with diabetes:

- A statin, such as simvastatin, for people over 40.
- Low-dose (81 mg) aspirin starting at age 40, if you don’t have a medical reason not to take it.
- An ACE inhibitor, such as lisinopril, for people 40 and over.

Talk to your doctor to find out if, and when, you should start taking these medicines.

For more information about diabetes and other health topics, visit the Health and Wellness Resources section on the Group Health Web site at www.ghc.org