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Cost of select insulin increases up to 20%

Fluctuation In \$ Over Last Few Months Pushed Up Costs:, Say Companies

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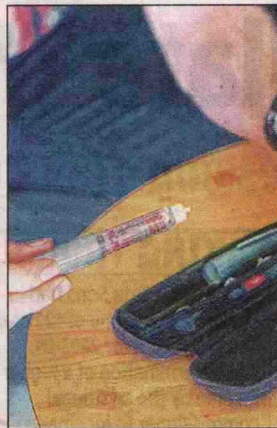
Chennai: Fluctuating US Dollar has pushed prices of insulin pens, cartridges and basal insulin by up to 20% over the last few months, thereby pushing up medical bills of diabetics in India.

Diabetologists say, nearly a third of their insulin dependent patients are now paying more for their daily medication.

Data sourced from the online medical store, Netmeds, show that cost of basal insulin — the type of insulin that regulates glucose levels between meals preventing low sugar, and premixed varieties that come in pens and cartridges have gone up anywhere between 3.5% to 20.9% between January and December 2018.

For instance, the cost of insulin pens sold by pharma giant Eli Lilly and Company has gone up by ₹134 in December 2018 from ₹640 in January. This is a 20.9% increase in a year, while Basalog One 100IU Pen Injection from Biocon went up by ₹79 or nearly 10% higher increase to the current price of ₹823.1. The cost of basal insulin by Sanofi went up by ₹277 to ₹2,983 in 2018 per vial.

Companies said the fluctuation in US Dollar prices over the last few months has pushed up costs and hence a price increase. "For



the products made in India, prices have been stable. Some products, like pens, cartridges and basal insulin are imported. Cost for most such products has gone up. Commonly used insulin that can be drawn into syringes from vials haven't gone up," said pharma analyst R Srinivasan. However strict vigilance by the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority, has helped maintain pointless price rise, he added.

The International Diabetes Federation data shows that the prevalence of diabetes among people between 20 - 79 years of age in India is 72.9 million. In Chennai more than a fifth of its population are diabetics.

Although less than a quarter of the patients across the country take insulin, at least 30% of those are prescribed basal insulin. Nearly a third of diabetics

in India are prescribed basal insulin. "These insulins are given to patients when there is a need. We also see if they can afford them," said award winning senior diabetologist Dr V Mohan.

The cost of managing diabetes is mostly out of pocket as most health insurers don't pay for outpatient therapy and drugs. The average monthly expense for a diabetic comes to be anywhere between Rs 3,000 to Rs 8,000 per month. In case of hospitalisation, it can cost anywhere between Rs 40,000 to Rs 1.5 lakh for medical management including intensive care.

For instance, 46-year-old chartered accountant Srinivasan R was advised a switch over — from human insulin on vials to basal insulin two years ago, after he complained about palpitation and dizziness at work.

"Tests show that my sugar levels were dropping down to dangerously low levels at certain times when the insulin is at its peak. My sugar levels were also fluctuating through the day. The basal insulin acts uniformly through day and I found the change comfortable," he said. But Srinivasan, who was paying around ₹2,700 for this insulin till mid-2018, has to pay at least ₹2,980 now. "This would mean at least ₹5,000 more for me every year. Medical insurance doesn't fund it," he said.