

What You Need to Know

Diabetes &

Heart Disease



People with type 2 diabetes are much more likely to develop heart problems or have a stroke. This handout includes steps you can take to protect your heart if you have diabetes.

- **Diabetes is one of the strongest risk factors for heart and vascular diseases** – it's right up there with smoking, elevated cholesterol or high blood pressure.
- **Heart disease is also the most common cause of death in people with diabetes.**

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Diabetes Can Hurt Your Heart & Blood Vessels

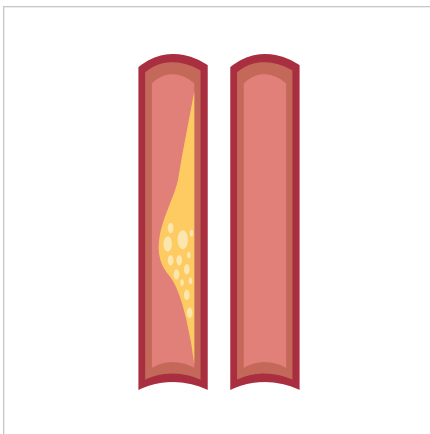
9 out of 10

People living with diabetes have at least one other risk factor for heart disease. Each one of these factors together makes the other worse.

Diabetes and cardiovascular disease share important risk factors – conditions that make a disease more likely.

These include:

- High cholesterol levels
- High blood pressure
- Being overweight or obese
- Sitting for extended periods of time or not exercising regularly
- Tobacco use or breathing in tobacco smoke



Your blood vessels act like pipes, carrying oxygen and nutrient-rich blood to your heart and the rest of your body. Diabetes can injure these vessels and help set the stage for heart and vessel disease.

Over time, high levels of sugar (or glucose) in the blood can:

- Change the way your heart works
- Affect how well your body circulates blood to vital organs and tissue
- Damage the inside lining of your blood vessels, including those that supply the heart and brain

Too much blood sugar can act like shards of glass, roughing up the lining of your blood vessels. This can result in swelling (inflammation) and makes it easier for plaque and other fatty substances to stick, build up and harden in the blood vessels.

When this happens, the blood vessels can become narrowed or blocked. This can disrupt or stop the normal flow of blood and lead to a heart attack or stroke. These changes often happen before someone even knows they have diabetes, so starting a conversation about your heart health is essential.

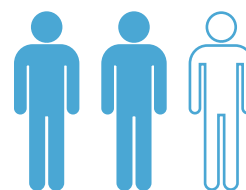
Did You Know?

2-4x

How much more likely someone with type 2 diabetes is to develop blockages in the heart's arteries or have a stroke compared to those without it

2 out of 3

How many deaths are due to heart disease or stroke among people with diabetes



Nearly 2/3

People with diabetes who also develop some form of heart failure

Diabetes isn't only linked to chest pain and heart attack. It's also related to other cardiovascular problems, including:

- **Stroke** – When blood flow to the brain is cut off, often resulting in significant disability and death
- **Heart Failure** – When the heart becomes weakened or stiff, so it may not pump well enough to meet the body's needs
- **Peripheral Artery Disease (PAD)** – Blockages in the arteries of the legs and arms

Even when blood sugar levels are controlled, some inflammation in the blood vessels is likely. **So, ask about how to best protect your heart and blood vessels — even if your blood sugar levels are in check.**

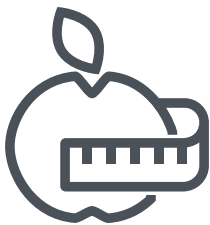
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Lowering Your Risk for Heart Problems

The good news is that if you have diabetes – and even if you already have heart disease along with diabetes – you can take steps to help protect your heart health and try to prevent a heart attack or stroke.

When you think about managing diabetes, think about your heart health, too. That means, in addition to yearly eye exams, daily foot care and routine blood sugar testing, you must also be mindful of your heart health.

Here's What You Can Do:



Commit to making healthy lifestyle changes.

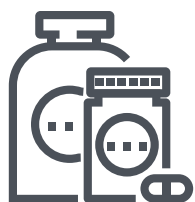
- Get regular exercise – aim for 150 minutes of moderate activity (brisk walking, dancing, biking) per week
- Eat a heart healthy diet
- Get to and stay at a healthy weight
- Adopt good sleep habits
- Manage stress

ABCs

Remember the “ABCs of diabetes”

This can help remind you of the importance of tracking your blood sugar numbers, along with your blood pressure and cholesterol.

- A** is for A1c, or HbA1c, which is a test that measures blood glucose control over the past two to three months. The A1c target for most people is under 7%.
- B** is for blood pressure. Nearly 2 out of 3 people with diabetes have high blood pressure. For most people with high blood pressure and diabetes, blood pressure levels should be <130/80 mm Hg.
- C** is for cholesterol. Total cholesterol, LDL and triglycerides should be checked regularly.
- S** is for stop smoking. Smoking doubles the risk of heart disease in people with diabetes.



Ask about the heart benefits of certain blood glucose-lowering medications.

Many people with type 2 diabetes and existing heart or blood vessel disease benefit from adding a novel diabetes medicine to help manage blood sugar and heart risks.



Healthy Lifestyle Choices



**Optimally Manage Diabetes,
Related Heart Problems and Stroke**

Metformin +
Other Medications
(SGLT2 inhibitor
or GLP-1RA)

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Get regular foot care.

Be sure to report any ulcers or wounds that won't heal.



Keep your follow-up appointments.

This will help you and your health care professional keep tabs on your overall health and risk factors.



Ask about referrals.

Other health care professionals (dietitians, social workers, diabetes educators) can help support a coordinated, team-based approach to your care.



Stay in tune with any changes to your heart or vascular health.

Know what symptoms and changes to watch for and when to check in.



Get vaccinated.

Protect yourself against the flu and pneumonia. Both can further stress your heart.

Questions to Ask Your Health Care Team

Ask questions and try to lead with what matters most to you and what would help you to reach your goals. Also, be sure to speak up if there are things that make it hard for you to follow your treatment plan (for example, cost, multiple medications, other demands, etc.).

- I've heard having diabetes makes you more likely to have "heart issues," too. But what does that mean for me?

- What can I do to lower my risk and what is my risk exactly?

- How often do I need to have my heart health checked?

- Is there anything I should be watching for?

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- When should I call my health care professional?

- Should I consider taking one of the glucose-lowering medications that can further lower my chances of a repeat heart problem and/or stroke?

- When it comes to managing my diabetes and the chance of related heart and blood vessel problems, it matters most to me that:

Additional Questions / Notes:
