



Diabetes and Heart Disease

If you have diabetes, you are two to four times more likely to have heart disease than someone without diabetes. This higher risk is due to diabetes, but it is also due to other risk factors for heart disease that occur in people with diabetes. But there's good news. You can help control your health risks by making some changes in your life. You can take steps to reduce your risk of heart disease by half--similar to the risk in people who don't have diabetes.

Your main risk factors

Three major risk factors for heart disease are high blood sugar, high blood pressure, and high levels of lipids. By keeping risk factors under control, you can help keep your heart and arteries healthy. This may reduce your chances of a heart attack.

- **Blood sugar.** High blood sugar can make artery walls tough and rough. Plaque (waxy material in the blood) can then build up, making it harder for blood to flow through the arteries. Having high blood sugar increases the chances of having high blood pressure and high cholesterol.
- **Blood pressure.** When blood pressure is high all the time, artery walls become damaged, increasing the risk for plaque build up.
- **Lipids.** The body needs some lipids in the blood to stay healthy. But lipid levels that are too high can damage the artery walls. Lipids include cholesterol and triglycerides. There are two kinds of cholesterol. LDL ("bad") cholesterol can damage the arteries. But HDL ("good") cholesterol helps clear LDL cholesterol from the blood vessels. This helps keep the arteries healthy. When blood sugar is high, the level of triglycerides in the blood may also be high. High blood triglyceride levels can cause plaque to form.



Your health care team will develop a treatment plan that works best for you.

Other risk factors

Certain lifestyle factors can increase levels of your blood sugar, blood pressure, and lipids. Such increases raise your risk of heart disease.

- **Smoking** damages the lining of your arteries. This allows plaque to build up in the artery walls. Smoking also constricts (narrows) the arteries, which can raise blood pressure. Smoking also increases your risk of getting type 2 diabetes.
- **Not being active** makes it harder for your heart to do its work. Inactivity is linked to many other risk factors, such as high blood pressure and poor cholesterol levels. Inactivity also increases your risk of getting type 2 diabetes.
- **Being overweight** makes it harder for your body to use insulin. It also makes your heart work too hard. Being overweight is also the main contributor to the development of type 2 diabetes,

Changes you can make

Following a few simple steps can help keep your risk factors under control. Work with your health care team to reach your goals.

- Quitting smoking could save your life. Smoking damages the lining of the blood vessels and raises blood pressure. Smoking also affects how your body uses insulin. This makes it harder to keep blood sugar under control. If you smoke and need help quitting, talk to your health care team.
- Testing your blood sugar is the only way to know whether it is under control. Be sure to test your blood sugar yourself. Also get your blood tested in the lab, as directed.
- Monitoring your blood pressure and lipid levels can help you achieve safe levels. Visit your health care team as scheduled.
- Taking medications as directed can help control blood sugar, blood pressure, blood clotting, and/or cholesterol levels.
- Eating right can reduce your risk factors and help you lose weight. Try to limit the amount of processed or refined carbohydrates you eat at one time. Cut back on your total calorie intake. Eat foods low in saturated fat and cholesterol. Eat fiber, including vegetables and whole grains, and cut down on salt. A dietitian or diabetes educator can help form a meal plan that works for you.
- Being active can help reduce your weight, strengthen your heart, and lower your lipid levels and blood pressure. Exercise and activity are good for your whole body. Talk to your health care team about increasing your activity safely over time.
- Keeping your appointments with your health care provider helps you stay healthy. Go in for checkups and lab tests as scheduled.



Take your medications as directed each day, even if you feel fine.

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