

Diabetes and Heart Disease

Many people with diabetes also have heart disease. When you do things to take care of your diabetes, like manage your blood sugar, exercise, and eat a healthy diet, that's also good for your heart.

It's important to understand your risk and how you can lower it.

Besides diabetes, do you also have:

- A waist that's larger than 35 inches in women or 40 inches in men?
- Low levels of "good" (HDL) cholesterol?
- High levels of "bad" (LDL) cholesterol or triglycerides (another type of fat in the blood)?
- High blood pressure?

If you're not sure, your doctor can check all those numbers for you.

Also, do you:

- Smoke?
- Have a family member with heart disease?
- Eat a diet high in saturated fat and cholesterol?

Your doctor needs that information to work with you on a plan for better heart health.

Types of Heart Disease

People with diabetes are at risk for:

Coronary artery disease. Your coronary arteries are in your heart. Fatty deposits, called plaques, can narrow them. If plaque suddenly breaks, it can cause a heart attack. Exercise, eating a healthy diet, and not smoking are musts.

Congestive heart failure. This is an ongoing condition in which the heart loses the ability to pump blood effectively. The main symptoms are shortness of breath when you're moving and leg swelling.

Many people have both conditions.

Take Action

If you smoke, it's time to quit. Set a date and talk to your doctor. If you've tried to quit before, it's not too late. Many people try several times before they kick the habit for good.

Nearly everyone with diabetes can benefit from getting more exercise. It's good for your heart and helps control your blood sugar. Even brisk walking counts, so you don't need a gym.

If you're not active now, let your doctor know you want to get started. She can let you know what's safe for you to do.

Some people with diabetes need to take medicine to lower their blood pressure or improve their cholesterol levels. Your doctor may recommend that you take a daily aspirin to protect against heart disease.

Be sure to keep up with your medical care. Go to all your appointments and let your doctor know how you're doing. Together, you can work toward a healthier heart.

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