

Diabetes and Heart Disease

What is the link between diabetes and heart disease?

Having diabetes means that there is too much sugar (glucose) in your blood. If blood sugar stays high for a long time, the inner lining of blood vessels may be damaged. This makes it easier for fatty deposits called plaque to build up in the blood vessels that bring blood to the heart. The plaque makes the blood vessels narrower. The narrowing decreases the amount of blood flow to the heart muscle. Small pieces of plaque may break off from the wall of a blood vessel and completely block a smaller blood vessel. This can cause chest pain (called angina), heart attack, or stroke.

Diabetes can also weaken the heart muscle. This can cause heart failure, which means that the heart is not able to pump enough blood to the body.

If you have diabetes:

- You are 2 to 4 times more likely to have a heart attack or stroke than someone without diabetes. You are also more likely to have a heart attack or stroke at a young age.
- If you have a heart attack, you are more likely to die from the heart attack.

How can I lower my risk?

Here are some of the things you can do to lower your risk of heart disease:

- Control your blood sugar. Keeping your blood sugar level in the proper range can prevent or delay blood vessel damage.
- Control your blood fats (cholesterol and triglycerides). Unhealthy levels of blood fats cause heart disease. This effect happens faster and is usually worse when you have diabetes. People with diabetes often have high levels of triglycerides and low levels of HDL (good cholesterol). Triglycerides should be below 150 and HDL should be above 60. Try to keep your LDL (bad cholesterol) below 100. If you already have heart disease, your provider may recommend an LDL goal below 70.
- Control your blood pressure. Nearly two-thirds of adults with diabetes have high blood pressure. Your blood pressure should be less than 140/80. Most people with diabetes often have to use 2 or more medicines to keep their blood pressure at or below that level.
- Carry your medicine with you and know how to take it properly. It also helps to have a list of the names and doses of medicines that you are taking and the instructions for taking them.
- Lose weight if you are overweight and stay at the lower weight. Weight loss can make it easier to control your blood sugar and blood pressure. It can lower your risk of heart disease.
- Exercise regularly according to your healthcare provider's instructions. Regular exercise can help you lose weight. It also helps lower your risk of heart disease.

- If you smoke, quit. When you have diabetes, smoking triples your risk of dying from heart problems.

Talk with your healthcare provider about any questions you have. Follow the treatment plan your provider prescribes.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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