

Take Care of Your Heart: Diabetes and Heart Disease

Having diabetes can lead to heart attack or stroke,
but it doesn't have to.

What is diabetes?

- Diabetes is a disease in which the body does not produce enough insulin or does not use insulin properly. Insulin is a hormone that is needed to change sugar, starches, and other foods into energy needed for daily life. With diabetes, the blood glucose (sugar) levels are high.
- Diabetes is serious and can lead to heart attack, blindness, amputation, and kidney problems.
- Diabetes is more and more common today for AI/AN. About one out of eight AI/AN adults has diabetes.

Type 2 Diabetes is most common in adults, but it is now starting to appear in children.

What are the signs and symptoms of Type 2 Diabetes?

- Many people have no signs or symptoms. Type 2 Diabetes develops gradually and sometimes has no symptoms. Even if you have no symptoms of diabetes, if you have any of the risk factors above, ask your health care provider about getting tested for it.

Your chances of getting diabetes are greater if:

- You are overweight, especially if you have extra weight around the waist.
- You are physically inactive.
- You have a family member with diabetes.
- You had diabetes during pregnancy (gestational diabetes), or gave birth to at least one baby weighing more than 9 pounds.
- Your blood pressure is 140/90 mmHg or higher, or you have been told that you have high blood pressure.
- Your cholesterol levels are not normal. Your HDL cholesterol ("good" cholesterol) is 40 mg/dL or lower, or your triglyceride level is 150 mg/dL or higher.

Here are signs to look for:

- Increased thirst
- Increased hunger
- Fatigue
- Increased urination, especially at night
- Weight loss
- Blurred vision
- Sores that do not heal

Be Smart About Your Heart: Control the ABCs of Diabetes

Some people have “**pre-diabetes,**” which is when blood glucose levels are higher than normal but not in the diabetes range. People with this condition can reduce the risks of developing the diabetes by losing a small amount of weight and increasing their physical activity.

If you have diabetes, controlling your blood glucose levels will help prevent complications.

The ABCs of Diabetes

If you have diabetes, three key steps can help you lower your risk of heart attack and stroke. Follow these "ABCs":

- **A is for A1C test,** which is short for hemoglobin A1C. This test measures your average blood glucose (blood sugar) over the last 3 months. It lets you know if your blood glucose level is under control. Get this test at least twice a year.

Number to aim for: below 7.

- **B is for blood pressure.** The higher your blood pressure, the harder your heart has to work. Get your blood pressure measured at every doctor’s visit.

Numbers to aim for: below 120/80 mmHg.

- **C is for cholesterol.** "Bad" cholesterol, or LDL, builds up and clogs your arteries. Get your LDL cholesterol tested at least once a year.

Number to aim for: below 100 mg/dL.

Be sure to ask your health care provider:

- What are my ABC numbers?
- What should my ABC target numbers be?
- What actions should I take to reach my ABC target numbers?

To lower your risk of heart attack and stroke, also take these steps:

- Get physical activity every day.
- Eat less salt, cholesterol, and fat, especially saturated fat.
- Eat more fiber. Choose whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and beans.
- Stay at a healthy weight.
- If you smoke, stop.
- Take medicines as prescribed.
- Ask your doctor about taking aspirin.
- Ask others to help you manage your diabetes.