Diabetes and Heart Disease

Living longer with heart disease

Discussion Guide for Patients & Caregivers

Questions to Ask Your Doctor
- What type of diabetes do I have?
- What tests do I need?
- What is my glucose level?
- What is my A1C level?
- How do I find out if I have heart disease? What are my risks?
- What foods are best for me to eat and what foods should I avoid?
- What changes should I make to my exercise routine?
- Are there medications I can take for diabetes that also help me avoid heart disease?
- What treatment options are available for me with the risks and benefits of each option?
- How can I monitor my diabetes, and can I monitor at home?
- How do I monitor my heart?

Contact Us
If you would like to receive support or need more information, please contact us at:

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If you have diabetes, you are twice as likely to get cardiovascular disease, including coronary artery disease, heart attack, atherosclerosis (narrowing of the arteries), and stroke. The longer you have diabetes, the higher your chance of getting heart disease and getting it at a younger age. This is because high blood sugar can damage your blood vessels.

Also, risk factors for diabetes, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol and obesity, are also risk factors for heart disease. People with type 2 diabetes are twice as likely to develop heart failure. And people with diabetes who have heart failure are more likely to be hospitalized and have worse long-term outcomes.

Type 2 diabetes can also damage your kidneys. This is another example of how the body works together and why managing your blood sugar levels is so important. If kidney damage occurs, that can affect your blood pressure, and that can affect your heart.

**Diabetes and Heart Disease**

**What is Diabetes?**

Diabetes is a chronic disease where your body does not properly turn food into energy for your body to use. When people have diabetes, their body can’t make enough of a hormone called insulin or can’t properly use the insulin it has. Insulin helps your body digest sugars that come from what you eat and drink. Without enough insulin, sugar builds up in your blood. Over time, that sugar buildup damages your nerves, blood vessels, heart, and kidneys.

Diabetes, unfortunately, is very common. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that about **1 in every 11 people** have diabetes and more than **1 in 3 Americans older than 20 years** have prediabetes, a condition in which a person’s blood sugar is high, but not yet high enough to trigger diabetes.

**Type 2 Diabetes** is the most common form of diabetes that typically is seen in older adults but can begin at any age. It is a long-term chronic condition where the body doesn’t regulate sugar or use it as fuel properly. Some patients can manage their blood sugar through diet and exercise, but others need medication to help. It is very important to treat diabetes.

**Managing Diabetes and Heart Disease**

Managing your diabetes and glucose levels is a very important part of taking care of your heart. Also, it is important to manage your heart disease if you have it. Here are some things that can help:

- **Educate yourself.** Learn about diabetes and heart disease so you can work with your care team and make informed choices.
- **Ask questions.** When you have questions and concerns, ASK.
- **Know your numbers.** It is important to monitor cholesterol numbers, blood pressure and A1C.
- **Eat healthy.** Avoid refined sugars, when possible, and eat more lean protein, fruits and vegetables.
- **Get exercise.** Start with small increases in activity and work your way up to 30 minutes 5 or more times a week, if you can. Ask your doctor.
- **Follow your treatment plan.** Take medications on schedule as prescribed and monitor your health.
- **Stay in care.** See your doctor regularly and keep appointments.

**Symptoms of Diabetes**

- Increased thirst
- Increased fatigue
- Increased appetite
- Increased urination
- Weight loss
- Blurred vision

**A1C is a test to determine the amount of glucose (sugar) in your blood.**

- **Normal** <5.7
- **Prediabetes** 5.8 - 6.4
- **Diabetes** >6.5