



# Taking care of your heart when you have diabetes

Maybe your health care provider has told you that you are at high risk for heart disease. Or, perhaps you already have had a heart attack. Having diabetes means that you are much more likely to have coronary artery (heart) disease, a heart attack, or a stroke. The good news is that you can take steps to prevent heart disease or reduce your chances of having another heart attack. Lifestyle changes, such as choosing foods wisely and being physically active, as well as taking medication can help.

## **What is coronary artery disease?**

Coronary artery disease is caused by a narrowing or blocking of the blood vessels that go to your heart. It's the most common form of heart disease. Your blood carries oxygen and other needed materials to your heart. Blood vessels to your heart can become partially or totally blocked by fatty deposits. A heart attack occurs when the blood supply to your heart is reduced or cut off.

## **What steps can I take to prevent coronary artery disease?**

You can lower your risk by keeping your ABCs of diabetes on target with wise food choices, physical activity, and medication. Losing weight can also help you manage your ABCs and prevent heart disease. Every step you take will help. The closer your numbers are to your targets, the better your chances of preventing heart disease or cutting your risk for another heart attack. If you smoke, get help to quit.

## **A is for A-1-C**

An A-1-C is the blood glucose (sugar) check "with a memory." It tells you your average blood glucose for the past 2 to 3 months. The American Diabetes Association (ADA) recommends that people aim for an A-1-C below 7.

## **B is for blood pressure**

Your blood pressure numbers tell you the force of blood inside your blood vessels. When your blood pressure is high, your heart has to work harder than it should. The ADA recommends that you keep your blood pressure below 130/80 (said as "130 over 80") mmHg.

### **C is for cholesterol**

Your cholesterol numbers tell you the amount of fat in your blood. Some kinds, like HDL cholesterol, help protect your heart. Other kinds, like LDL cholesterol, can clog your blood vessels and lead to heart disease. Triglycerides are another kind of blood fat that raises your risk for heart disease.

### **What can I do to reach my ABC targets?**

Making wise food choices, being physically active and taking medications can help you reach your targets.

### **Make wise food choices**

Many people find that changing what they eat can make a big difference in their blood glucose, blood pressure, and cholesterol levels. For more information about how to make these changes, schedule an appointment with a registered dietitian if you have not seen one in the past year.

### **Lose weight or take steps to prevent weight gain**

Managing your weight can help your diabetes and your heart. Small changes, like eating less fat and calories and being more active each day can help. Talk to your health care team for support and resources to help you with your efforts

### **Be physically active**

Before you start a new routine, check with your health care team to find out which activities will be safe for you. Then think about how you can add more activity to your routine. If you're just starting out, begin with 5 minutes a day and gradually add more time. Then work up to doing a total of about 30 minutes of aerobic exercise, such as brisk walking, most days of the week.

### **Take medications**

Medications are available to help you reach your ABC targets and lower your risk of another heart attack. You may need several medications to stay on track.

Some types of blood pressure and cholesterol-lowering medications can protect your heart. Your health care provider can provide information about which medications are best for you. Aspirin can also help lower your risk of heart disease. Ask your provider whether taking a low-dose aspirin every day would be wise.

### **What can help me quit smoking?**

If you're ready to quit, talk with your health care team. They can help you find ways to quit. Joining a support group or smoking-cessation program can also help.

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