

Diabetes and your health

Caring for your heart while managing diabetes



Caring for your diabetes and helping your heart

You may have just learned you have diabetes. Or you may have been managing your diabetes for some years now. People with diabetes are more likely to have heart problems. That's why it's important to take steps to look after your heart health.

Read this brochure to learn:

- How to take care of your heart as part of your diabetes action plan
- How you can work with the members of your healthcare team
- Your diabetes ABCs—3 important ways to care for your diabetes and help your heart



Helping your heart matters

Taking care of your heart matters even more when you have diabetes. That is because heart disease is more common in people with diabetes.



Some people are at higher risk for heart disease

Adults with diabetes are twice as likely to have heart disease as people without diabetes. And certain ethnic groups have a greater chance than others. These groups include Native Americans, African Americans, Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders, Hispanic/Latino Americans, and Asian Americans.

Your family history also affects your chances for diabetes-related problems. If your mother, father, sister, or brother has diabetes or heart disease, then your chances may also go up. Be sure to share your family history with your healthcare provider.



Joe's story

Joe knew that having diabetes was something he needed to take seriously. Still, he was surprised when his doctor told him that having diabetes may increase his chances for heart disease. He told the doctor he wanted to take every healthy step he could to manage his diabetes and help protect his heart. Together they came up with a plan to try to manage his blood sugar and heart health.

Making the heart connection

Your heart health

People with diabetes have higher chances for heart disease, compared to people without diabetes. They may also have other health issues that may put them at risk for heart disease. These include:

- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Being overweight
- Family history of heart disease

Having diabetes increases your chances for having a heart attack and stroke.

- A heart attack happens when there is not enough blood flow to the heart. As a result, the heart does not get the oxygen it needs and may be badly injured.
- A stroke happens when blood is not able to get to a part of your brain. As a result, the brain may be severely damaged.

Working with your healthcare team

It takes a team

Healthcare providers can help you in different ways to take the best possible care of yourself. Your healthcare team might include a:

- **Primary care provider (PCP)**—This is the doctor you see for regular checkups or when you are sick. PCPs may be family doctors or internists.
- **Endocrinologist (said en-doe-krin-AH-luh-jist)**—This is a doctor who specializes in caring for people with diabetes.
- **Cardiologist**—This is a doctor who specializes in caring for your heart.
- **Diabetes nurse practitioner or certified diabetes educator (CDCES)**—These people teach or care for people with diabetes. They can help you learn how to manage diabetes day to day. They can also help you make a plan to increase healthy behaviors.
- **Registered dietitian**—This person helps you learn how to choose healthy foods and follow a diet that is right for you. A registered dietitian also teaches you how to plan meals and figure out your food needs over time.
- **Pharmacist**—This person can talk with you about any medicines you are taking.

YOU are the most important member of your healthcare team!



Know your diabetes ABCs

The ABCs of diabetes are very important ways to take care of your diabetes. The ABCs stand for:

A is for the **A1C test** (said *A-one-C*)

B is for **blood pressure**

C is for **cholesterol** (said *ko-LESS-ter-all*)





is for the A1C test

- **What is it?**

An A1C test shows what your **average** blood sugar level has been over the past 2 to 3 months. The test does not check for blood sugar highs and lows, but it can give an overall picture of blood glucose control. This is different from daily blood sugar checks, which only show your blood sugar level at that particular time you check your blood sugar.

A high A1C is a sign that your diabetes treatment plan may not be working. Talk with your healthcare provider about the changes you may need.

- **How often should you have the A1C test?**

Have the test *at least* 2 times each year. If your A1C is above your goal, your healthcare provider may check it every 3 months.

- **Why does A1C matter?**

A higher A1C is a sign that you may have a higher chance of having problems with your heart, blood vessels, kidneys, eyes, skin, and feet.

- **What is a healthy A1C target number?**

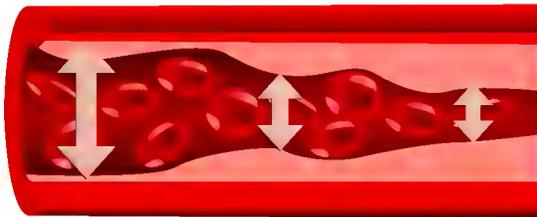
The American Diabetes Association recommends that most people aim for an A1C goal below 7%. Talk with your healthcare provider about an A1C goal that is right for you.

B

is for blood pressure

- **What is it?**

Blood pressure is the force of blood flow pushing against the inside of a type of blood vessel (called an *artery*). When there is too much force, it may damage the arteries. This may cause them to narrow. This makes your heart work too hard.



Normal	Prehypertension	Hypertension
Normal force on arteries	Too much force may damage the arteries, causing them to narrow	

- **How often should you have your blood pressure checked?**

It should be checked at every regular visit. You may also want to check it at home between visits. Ask your healthcare provider how often you should check your blood pressure.

- **Why does blood pressure matter?**

High blood pressure makes your heart work too hard. Having diabetes and high blood pressure increases your chances for heart disease, kidney disease, and eye problems.

- **What is a healthy blood pressure goal for most people with diabetes?**

Blood pressure is listed as 2 numbers. For most people with diabetes, the top number should be less than 140. The bottom number should be less than 90. This goal is written as *below 140/90 mmHg*.* Talk with your healthcare provider about a blood pressure goal that is right for you.



*This is a unit of measurement. *mmHg* means *millimeters of mercury*.



is for cholesterol

- **What is it?**

Your blood contains several fatty substances known as lipids. These include:

LDL (low density lipoprotein) cholesterol

— This lipid is called *bad cholesterol*. It can clog up or block your blood vessels.

HDL (high density lipoprotein) cholesterol

— This lipid is called *good cholesterol*. It helps clear bad cholesterol from the insides of blood vessels and helps keep them from getting blocked.

Triglycerides (said try-GLISS-uh-rides)

— High levels of this type of lipid can increase the chances for heart disease.

- **How often should you have your lipids tested?**

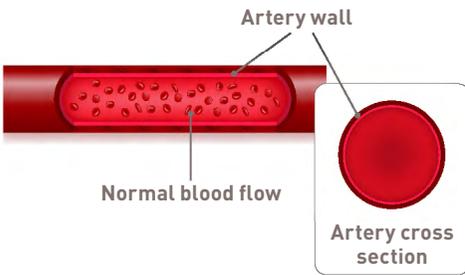
Have them tested when you are diagnosed with diabetes. Then, test them every 5 years, or as often as your healthcare provider recommends.



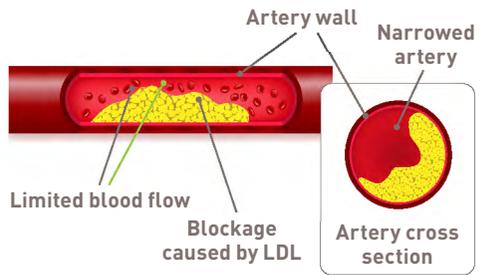
- **Why do lipids matter?**

Having high levels of LDL cholesterol can cause a blockage in your blood vessels. This may lead to a heart attack or a stroke. On the other hand, high levels of HDL cholesterol may help keep your arteries from getting clogged.

Normal artery



Clogged artery



- **What are the goals?**

For most people with diabetes, the lipid goals are:

- LDL: Varies by person. Ask your healthcare provider about your goals.
- HDL: 50 mg/dL* or above for women; 40 mg/dL or above for men
- Triglycerides: Below 150 mg/dL

Talk with your healthcare provider about your lipid goals.

*This is a unit of measurement. *mg/dL* means *milligrams per deciliter*.

Taking heart-healthy steps

Making a diabetes action plan

An important first step is to make the decision to manage your diabetes. The next step is to work with your healthcare provider to make a diabetes action plan that will help you reach your diabetes ABC goals. Each of us is different. We have our own needs and habits. Make an action plan that works for you.

Your action plan

Following the steps in an action plan like the one on the following pages can help you manage your diabetes and may help your heart.



Take all of your medicines as directed even if you feel fine

- Consider using a weekly pill box to help keep track of when to take your medicines.
- Talk with your pharmacist about services that can help you take your medicines at the right time every day.





Follow a healthy meal plan

- The following foods are part of a healthy diet: fresh vegetables and fruits, chicken, turkey, fish, whole wheat bread, brown rice, and low-fat dairy products.
- Choose healthy (called monounsaturated) fats. These include olive oil, avocado, and many unsalted nuts and seeds.
- Reduce the amount of saturated fat, found in foods like red meat and cheese. Avoid foods with trans fats, found in many processed foods like frozen pizza and coffee creamers.
- Reduce the amount of salt (sodium) in your diet. Talk with your healthcare provider about how you can do this.
- Avoid sugary drinks (like soda, sweetened tea, and energy drinks) and foods with high amounts of added sugars.
- Consider seeing a dietitian for meal-planning suggestions.

Your action plan (continued)



Get to and stay at a healthy weight

- Losing even a small amount of weight (about 10 pounds) can reduce blood pressure in many overweight people. It may even prevent high blood pressure.



Be physically active

- Try to get 30 minutes of physical activity at least 5 days each week or as recommended by your healthcare provider.
- Limit the amount of time you spend sitting down to less than 90 minutes at any one time.



If you smoke, ask your healthcare provider for tips to quit

- People with diabetes who smoke are more likely to have heart, kidney, and eye disease and nerve damage, compared to people with diabetes who don't smoke.
- When you stop smoking, your heart rate and blood pressure are likely to go down.
- Over time, you may have better control over your blood sugar levels.



Check and record your blood pressure and blood sugar levels often

- Write down your numbers on a pocket calendar or in a diary.
- Show the numbers to your healthcare provider at every visit.



Follow your diabetes daily care routine and keep all of your appointments with your healthcare providers

- Keep notes about the steps you are taking every day. Share them with your healthcare provider.
- Keep track of your appointments on your phone's calendar, if it has one. Or you can keep track of them on a regular calendar.

Use the tool on the next page to help track your diabetes ABCs. Share it with your healthcare provider when you talk with him or her about your action plan.



Tracking your diabetes ABCs

Set your target goals and how often to measure them with your healthcare provider. Write them down, along with the dates and results of your tests and exams. Show this record to your healthcare team and talk about your results and how to meet your goals. Together, you can make changes to your diabetes action plan.

A1C

At least 2 times each year*

My target: _____

Usual goal: below 7%*

Date

Result

Blood pressure

At every healthcare visit*

My target: _____

Usual goal: below 140/90*

Date

Result

Cholesterol test (a blood test, called a lipid profile)

At diagnosis, then at least every 5 years

LDL cholesterol

My target: _____

Talk with your healthcare provider.

Date

Result

HDL cholesterol

My target: _____

Usual goal: 50 or above for women; 40 or above for men*

Date

Result

Triglycerides

My target: _____

Usual goal: below 150*

Date

Result

*American Diabetes Association recommendation.

Do you take care of your heart?

Taking care of your heart and your health may not always be easy. Think about some of the challenges you may be having. Place a check mark below next to any of the reasons that may have kept you from managing your heart health. Then read the column “Something to think about.”

My concerns:	Something to think about:
<input type="checkbox"/> I don't have time to check my blood pressure.	Checking your blood pressure doesn't have to be hard. Think about getting a home blood pressure kit.
<input type="checkbox"/> I keep forgetting to take my cholesterol medication.	Use a pill box, alarms, and smartphone apps to help you remember to take your medicines. Try to follow a schedule. For example, take your morning medicines right after you brush your teeth.
<input type="checkbox"/> I've tried to quit smoking before but it never works.	Many people have to try to quit smoking several times before it works. Ask your healthcare provider for help.
<input type="checkbox"/> I can't seem to lose weight and keep it off.	Ask your healthcare provider for the name of a dietitian to help you with meal planning.



If you checked any boxes above, be sure to talk with your healthcare provider about your concerns.



Joe is doing everything he can to manage his diabetes and help his heart. He's taking all of his medicines as he discussed with his healthcare team. He's eating a variety of healthy foods. And he follows the physical activity plan his healthcare provider recommended.

Joe also writes down his blood sugar and blood pressure readings. He shows them to his healthcare provider at every office visit. Joe has a great healthcare team and the support of family and friends.



Work with your healthcare team to help make lifestyle changes for a healthy heart.



**Learn more about your
heart and diabetes**

**American Diabetes
Association**

www.diabetes.org

1-800-DIABETES

(1-800-342-2383)

**American Heart
Association**

www.heart.org

1-800-AHA-USA-1

(1-800-242-8721)

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