

Women's *Heart Advantage*

Heart Healthy Information: Diabetes and Reducing Your Risk

Women with diabetes have a higher chance of having heart disease and a stroke. About 9 million women in the U.S. have diabetes, and about one-third don't even know they have the disease. The chance of having heart disease increases when diabetes is not noticed or treated. Women with diabetes have a greater risk of death related to heart disease and stroke than men.

What is diabetes?

Certain foods you eat turn into sugar to give your body fuel and energy. Insulin, which is made by the body, is needed to get the sugar to work. In diabetes, the body doesn't make insulin (type 1) or doesn't use insulin the way it should (insulin resistance/type 2). Without insulin, your body cannot use the food you eat, your body will not work well, and blood sugar will rise. High blood sugar can cause kidney problems, blindness, infections, and nerve problems. Diabetes, which can increase bad cholesterol levels, can also cause high blood pressure. Heart attacks are more common and more serious in people with diabetes.

In type 1 diabetes, you may notice you are thirsty, hungry, tired, urinating more than normal, losing weight, not seeing as well and getting sick. With type 2 diabetes, these symptoms develop more slowly and may be harder to notice. That's why it's often undetected and untreated.

Are you at risk?

Take care of yourself. It's important to know if you could develop diabetes. You should get tested if you answer *yes* to one of the following questions:

- Are you over 45 years old?
- Are you Hispanic or African American, American Indian, Asian American or Pacific Islander?
- Are you overweight or obese (especially if you have extra weight around your middle)?
- Do you refrain from physical activity?
- Are you a woman who had diabetes during pregnancy?
- Are you a woman who had a baby weighing more than 9 pounds at birth?
- Do you have a family history of diabetes?

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Santa Cruz
Medical Foundation

A Sutter Health Affiliate

Women's Heart Advantage is an educational program sponsored by the doctors, nurses and hospitals of Sutter Health to raise awareness of women's heart disease, risk factors, early detection, and treatment. This information is provided to help you understand how certain factors can affect your chances for heart disease and how to help control them. For more information, visit www.hearts.sutterhealth.org.

What you can do to decrease your risk of diabetes

If you think you could have diabetes, you should have a blood sugar test (glucose test done in a laboratory). Diabetes is defined as a blood sugar of 126 mg/dL or more.

You may prevent diabetes and heart disease if you do the following:

- **Lose weight:** Too much fat makes your body work harder to make insulin. The heart has to work hard too! Follow a low fat, low calorie, less sugar and low carbohydrate diet. People who lost about 10 to 15 pounds decreased their chance of getting diabetes by 58 percent. Staying at a healthy weight decreases the risk of diabetes and heart disease.
- **Be active (30 minutes most days a week):** Regular physical exercise helps lower insulin resistance allowing your body to use its own insulin better. Physical exercise also decreases blood pressure and decreases heart attack and stroke.
- **Stop smoking:** Tobacco increases the chance of heart disease and stroke by increasing heart rate, narrowing blood vessels and increasing blood pressure. When you smoke, the amount of oxygen to the heart is decreased.
- **Other ways to lower risk:** Keep your blood sugar, cholesterol and blood pressure within normal limits.

If you have diabetes

Making a few changes can help you live a healthy, normal life if you have diabetes.

Three key steps, known as the ABC's of diabetes, can help lower your chance of having diabetes related problems including heart attack and stroke.

- **A** is for A1c test, known as hemoglobin A1c, which should be done twice a year. It measures the average blood glucose over the last 3 months. Goal is below 7 percent.
- **B** is for blood pressure. Keeping your blood pressure below 120/80 decreases the amount of work on the heart and also reduces kidney problems.
- **C** is for cholesterol. Bad cholesterol, or LDL, clogs your blood vessels and increases your risk of heart disease. The LDL goal is less than 100 mg/dl.

The following are ways to keep the ABC's of diabetes under control:

- Lose weight and stay at a healthy weight by eating a diet low in fat, sugar, calories, carbohydrates, and high in fiber. See a dietitian to develop a weight loss program and get tips for a healthy diet.
- Exercise for 30 minutes most days a week to decrease insulin needs and to lower blood sugar levels.
- Take your medicine as ordered, and test your blood sugar levels.
- Stop smoking to help improve your blood vessels and heart.



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