

DIABETES AND YOUR HEART

DIET EXERCISE MEDICATION

Diabetes and your heart

- People with diabetes get 2-3 times more heart attacks, heart failure and strokes than people without diabetes.
- The risk of heart attacks is even greater amongst women with diabetes.
- Chest pain (angina) occurring with physical activity is the usual sign of heart disease.
- However, people with diabetes may develop significant heart disease without developing chest pain. It may cause shortness of breath when performing daily tasks.

Why does diabetes increase the risk of heart disease?

- Diabetes increases the thickening and narrowing inside blood vessels (atherosclerosis).
- Diabetes also allows blood clots to form more easily within the blood vessels.
- Blockages in the coronary arteries cause a heart attack and blockages in the arteries to the brain cause a stroke. Blockages in the arteries to the legs cause poor circulation, pain on walking and may lead to amputation.
- Diabetes is often associated with other risk factors for heart disease, such as high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol levels, not being regularly active and being overweight. The risk of heart attack doubles when each of these conditions is present with diabetes.

Can the risk of heart disease be reduced?

YES – definitely. You and your doctor will need to monitor your risk factors. Special tests such as a resting and exercise electrocardiogram (ECG) may be requested.

- Blood glucose levels should be kept as close to normal as possible (4-7mmol/L). Ensure that your fasting blood glucose is usually less than 7mmol/L and that tests, which indicate the longer-term average blood glucose control, are close to the non-diabetic range (fructosamine less than 300, haemoglobin A1c less than 7%).
- If you are a smoker, stopping smoking is essential because any level of smoking is harmful.
- If you are carrying extra weight, especially around the waist, try to lose some of those extra kilos. Ask a dietitian for advice.

- Keep blood cholesterol low (5.0 mmol/L or lower is ideal). A low intake of saturated (mainly animal) fats will help achieve this. Tablets may be necessary to reduce cholesterol levels.
- Regular physical activity helps to lose weight, improve blood glucose and blood pressure.
- Blood pressure can be improved by physical activity, weight reduction, reducing salt intake and, if needed, by taking regular medications.

Tips for a healthy heart

- Eat foods and snacks low in fat and salts.
- Make meals with little added fats and salts.
- Fruits, vegetables, breads and cereals help protect against heart disease. However, eating large amounts can raise your blood glucose level too high, so eat in moderation.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Aim to be physically active for at least 30 minutes on most days. Daily is ideal, three times a week is good but anything is better than nothing. Walking is a great form of physical activity. It is easily affordable and at your front door.
- Stop smoking if you are a smoker.
- Have your blood glucose, blood pressure and cholesterol levels checked regularly.
- Take prescribed tablets regularly.
- If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation – up to two standard drinks a day for women and up to three for men.

This pamphlet has been produced jointly by The National Heart Foundation of New Zealand and Diabetes New Zealand.

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This pamphlet is for people with diabetes and for general use in the community.

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