

What You Need to Know: Preventing Diabetes & Heart Disease

Did You Know?

- 2 out of 3 Americans are overweight or obese.
- Nearly 1 in 3 American adults has high blood pressure.
- Nearly 1 in 4 American adults has high cholesterol.
- More than 1 in 6 Americans has pre-diabetes.
- Nearly 1 million Americans die from diabetes, heart disease, and stroke each year.

The effects of diabetes and heart disease are devastating. Diabetes can lead to blindness, kidney failure, nerve damage, amputations, and heart disease. Heart disease can lead to many problems including peripheral arterial disease, chronic heart failure, heart attack, and early death.

Know Your Risk

Your risk for type 2 diabetes and heart disease is affected by a number of risk factors. Each of these risk factors poses a danger to good health, and the more you have, the greater your risk.

- Overweight & obesity
- High blood glucose
- Cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Smoking
- Physical inactivity

Lower Your Risk

The good news is that you can manage your risk and prevent type 2 diabetes and heart disease. It's not too hard and you can do it. Small steps make a big difference and can help you live a longer, healthier life.

Step 1: Your first step is to see your doctor for a checkup and find out your risk. Once you know the facts, you and your doctor can decide what you can do to have the biggest effect on your health.

Step 2: Visit CheckUpAmerica.org or call 1-800-DIABETES for information, tips on getting started, and ideas for simple, small steps you can take to help lower your risk.

What You Need to Know: What Is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a condition where the body can't use energy from food well. Your body gets energy from food. In a person without diabetes, the body breaks food down into glucose (sugar) and sends it into the bloodstream. Insulin, a hormone made by the pancreas, helps move the glucose from the blood into the cells, where it can be used for energy. In people with type 2 diabetes, the pancreas doesn't make enough insulin, the insulin doesn't work very well, or both. Without insulin, the glucose can't get from the bloodstream into the cells, so the amount of glucose in your blood rises. This is called high blood glucose. Untreated, high blood glucose causes problems such as nerve damage, kidney or eye problems, heart disease, and stroke.

What Is Pre-Diabetes?

In pre-diabetes, blood glucose levels are higher than normal but aren't high enough to be called diabetes. Pre-diabetes is a silent disease, meaning you can have it but not know it. The good news is that cutting back on calories, being physically active, and losing weight can reverse pre-diabetes and delay or prevent type 2 diabetes. Diabetes doesn't go away once you have it, so it's better to prevent it in the first place.

Preventing Pre-Diabetes and Diabetes

The good news is that you can reverse pre-diabetes and prevent or delay type 2 diabetes. In a recent study, people at high risk for type 2 diabetes greatly lowered their risk by eating less, and getting more exercise. Increasing their physical activity, and losing weight. They—

- cut down on fat
- consumed fewer calories
- exercised about 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week, usually by brisk walking, and
- lost weight—an average of 15 pounds in the first year of the study.

These strategies worked well for both men and women and particularly well for people aged 60 and older. Several other studies also have shown that type 2 diabetes can be delayed or prevented.

Remember: You don't have to take drastic steps. If you burn more calories than you take in—even by a little bit—you will lose weight. Visit CheckUpAmerica.org or call 1-800-DIABETES (342-2383) for tips on how to get started.

What You Need to Know: Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a form of fat that is carried through the body in two kinds of bundles, or lipoproteins. It's important to have healthy levels of both.

- Low-density lipoproteins (LDL) can lead to a buildup of cholesterol in the arteries. Some people call LDL “bad” cholesterol. The higher the LDL level in your blood, the greater chance you have of getting heart disease. A good goal is to have your LDL under 100 mg/dl.
- High-density lipoproteins (HDL) are also known as “good” cholesterol. HDL helps remove cholesterol from your body, so the higher your HDL, the lower your risk for heart disease. A good goal is to have your HDL above 60 mg/dl.

Triglycerides are another kind of blood fat that raises your chances for a heart attack or stroke if your levels are too high. Generally, you want your triglycerides to be lower than 150 mg/dl. Your doctor may also give you a “total” cholesterol number. A good total cholesterol goal is less than 200 mg/dl.

What Can You Do to Improve Your Numbers?

It's a good idea to have your cholesterol checked every 5 years, or more often if there's a problem. Here are some steps you can take to improve your cholesterol:

- If you smoke, quit.
- Lose weight
- Participate in moderate physical activity most days of the week
- Switch to a low-fat, low-cholesterol diet
- Your doctor may also prescribe cholesterol-lowering medication

Cholesterol is also affected by blood pressure and blood glucose. If your blood glucose and blood pressure are high, it's likely that your cholesterol numbers may be off as well. All of these are risk factors for diabetes and heart disease, and the more risk factors you have, the greater your risk. Talk to your doctor and find out whether you may be at higher risk for diabetes and heart disease. Then take steps to lower your risk so you can live a longer, healthier life.

What You Need to Know: Getting Started with Physical Activity

There are many reasons to get started with physical activity. Here's what physical activity can do for you:

- Lower your blood glucose (sugar), blood pressure, and cholesterol.
- Lower your risk for diabetes, heart disease, and stroke.
- Relieve stress.
- Strengthen your heart, muscles, and bones.
- Improve your blood circulation and tone your muscles.
- Keep your body and joints flexible.

Even if you've never exercised before, you can find ways to add physical activity to your day. You'll experience benefits even if your activities aren't strenuous. Soon, exercise will be a natural part of your routine.

Getting Started

At the start, aim for two goals:

1. Try to get at least 30 minutes of aerobic activity most days of the week.
2. Increase how active you are throughout the day.

If you haven't been very active recently, you can start out with 5 or 10 minutes a day and work up to more time. Or split up your activity for the day—try a brisk 10-minute walk after each meal. Some aerobic activities you might want to try include brisk walking, dancing, swimming, or going for a bicycle ride

Being active throughout the day helps burn calories, and there are lots of ways to do it. Which activities would you like to try?

- Walk instead of drive when you can.
- If you do drive, park at the far end of the lot.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Walk around while talking on the phone.
- Work in the garden, rake leaves, or wash the car.
- Play with the kids.

What You Need to Know: Managing High Blood Pressure

Nearly 1 in 3 American adults has high blood pressure. Your heart has to work harder when blood pressure is high, and your risk for heart disease, stroke, and other problems goes up. High blood pressure is a problem that won't go away without treatment, which can include lifestyle changes and/or medication.

What is High Blood Pressure?

Blood pressure is the force of blood flow inside your blood vessels. Your doctor records your blood pressure as two numbers, such as 120/80, which you may hear them say as "120 over 80". Both numbers are important.

The first number is the pressure as your heart beats and pushes blood through the blood vessels. Health care providers call this the "systolic" pressure. The second number is the pressure when the vessels relax between heartbeats. It's called the "diastolic" pressure.

The lower your blood pressure, the better your chances of delaying or preventing a heart attack or a stroke. Write down your most recent results and your goal. If you're unsure of your results or how to set a goal, talk with your doctor.

Lowering Blood Pressure with Lifestyle Changes

One way to help control your blood pressure is with lifestyle changes. These changes include altering your diet to include fruits and vegetables, wholegrain breads and cereals, low-fat or fat free dairy products, certain nuts, and lean meats. You can also cut the amount of salt in your diet through smart shopping and cooking. Finally, you can make important alterations in your daily behaviors, such as doing 30 minutes of aerobic exercise, like walking, most days; limiting the consumption of alcohol; and cutting out smoking.

Lowering Blood Pressure with Medications

Several types of medications are available to help treat high blood pressure. Not everyone takes the same blood pressure medication, and many people take more than one kind. Which ones you take, if any, will depend on your blood pressure readings and other factors such as cost and side effects. You may hear your doctor refer to types of medications such as ACE inhibitors, ARBS, beta blockers, calcium channel blockers, or diuretics (water pills). Talk with your doctor about which one might be right for you.

What You Need to Know: Quitting Smoking

It is no secret that smoking is bad for your health. Smoking hurts your lungs and your heart. It decreases the amount of oxygen that gets to your organs, raises your cholesterol, and raises your blood pressure—all factors that can increase your chance of heart attack or stroke.

But there is something you can do: challenge yourself to quit smoking. Here are some steps to help you succeed:

Step One: Realize the benefits of quitting

Quitting helps your heart and lungs—and it lowers the risk of hurting your blood vessels, eyes, nerves, and other organs. And dropping smoking from your life can leave you with fewer wrinkles on your face; better-smelling hair, breath, and clothes; and less exposure for your family to secondhand smoke.

Step Two: Prepare to quit

Quitting is hard work, so approach it like any major project. Before you quit:

- Set a quit date, and tell your friends and family about it. Make this a time when your life is fairly calm and stress levels are low.
- Think of your own reasons for quitting, and write them down. Put the list where you'll see it every day.
- Throw away your cigarettes, matches, lighters, and ashtrays.
- Ask others for their help and understanding. Ask a friend who smokes to consider quitting with you.

Step Three: Choose a quitting strategy

- Go cold turkey. Quitting all at once works for some people.
- Taper off. Quit smoking gradually by cutting back over several weeks.
- Use a nicotine patch, gum, inhaler, or spray. Or ask your doctor for a prescription medication.
- Ask your doctor for information about counseling, acupuncture, or hypnosis.

You can use one of these steps or a combination of them. When you do, you'll feel healthier right away, and you'll be healthier for the rest of your life.