

Take Care of Your Diabetes by Taking Care of Your Heart by the [National Diabetes Education Program](#)



Although American Indian and Alaska Native cultures have diversity in traditions, heritage, history and art, they also have one thing in common – being at high risk for diabetes. Diabetes is disproportionately affecting American Indians and Alaska Natives – 15 percent of adults aged 20 years or older have diabetes. Taking into account population age differences, American Indians and Alaska Natives are twice as likely to have diabetes as non-Hispanic whites.

Diabetes is a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease in all American Indian populations, and cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death for American Indians and Alaska Natives – two out of three people with diabetes die from heart disease or stroke. Also, adults with diabetes are two to four times more likely to have heart disease or suffer a stroke and have the same cardiovascular risk as someone who has already had a heart attack.

There Is Good News.

Keeping blood glucose, blood pressure, and cholesterol within your target range can help delay or prevent heart disease, stroke, and other health problems. If you have diabetes, you need to learn to control the ABCs of diabetes. Research shows that the key to reducing the risk of heart attack and stroke in people with diabetes is to control the ABCs – as measured by the **A1C** test, **B**lood pressure, and **C**holesterol – three of the major risk factors for heart disease:

- **A is for the A1C test.** It measures your average blood glucose level over the past three months.
- **B is for blood pressure.** High blood pressure makes your heart work too hard.
- **C is for cholesterol.** Bad cholesterol, or LDL, builds up and clogs your arteries.

Ask your health care team what your ABC numbers *are*, what they *should be*, and how you can work with your health care team to *reach your target levels*. For most people with diabetes, the target levels are A1C below 7, blood pressure below 130/80, and LDL cholesterol below 100. Have your A1C level checked at least twice a year. Have your blood pressure checked at each visit and your cholesterol checked at least once a year.

You Can Take Action.

“Diabetes and cardiovascular disease are threatening our American Indian and Alaska Native communities, but we can fight back,” says Kelly Moore, chair of the National Diabetes Education Program’s American Indian and Alaska Native Work Group, the 2006 Association of American Indian Physicians’ Physician of the Year, and member of the Creek Nation of Oklahoma. “The good news is that we can protect ourselves and future generations by managing our diabetes and preventing heart attacks and strokes.”

Share the good news with your community – for you, your family, and future generations. Work with your health care team to use these tips to help you stay healthy:

- **Reach and stay at a healthy weight.** Being overweight or obese is a risk factor for heart attack and stroke.

- **Get 30 to 60 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week.** Brisk walking is a great way to move more.
- **Eat foods that are low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt, and added sugars.** Choose lean meats, poultry, fish, nuts, and fat-free or low-fat milk.
- **Eat more fiber.** Choose whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and dry peas and beans.
- **Stop smoking.** Smoking is one of the major risk factors associated with heart attack and stroke. Ask your health care team for help.
- **Take your medications as directed.** Ask your doctor about taking daily aspirin.
- **Ask your family and friends to help you manage your diabetes.** A little support goes a long way.

For free information on diabetes for [American Indians and Alaska Natives](#), contact the National Diabetes Education Program at <http://www.YourDiabetesInfo.org> or call 1-888-693-NDEP. Learn more through NDEP's [Take Care of Your Heart. Manage Your Diabetes tip sheet \(adapted for American Indians and Alaska Natives\)](#), [4 Steps to Control Your Diabetes. For Life. brochure](#), and many other [Control Your Diabetes. For Life. campaign materials](#).

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