



African Americans: Know the Link between Diabetes and Heart Disease

by the National Diabetes Education Program

Hall of Fame basketball player Walter Frazier. Academy-award winning actress Halle Berry. Grammy-award nominated R&B singer Angie Stone. What do these stars have in common besides their celebrity status? They are among the more than 3 million African Americans living with diabetes.

African Americans are almost twice as likely to have diabetes as non-Hispanic whites. With this higher risk of diabetes also comes an increased risk for the #1 cause of early death among people with diabetes – heart attack and stroke.

Here Is The Good News.

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.

You Can Take Action To Help Prevent Heart Attack And Stroke.

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. Work with your health care team to develop an action plan of lifestyle changes to help reach and maintain your target ABCs.

The National Diabetes Education Program (NDEP) offers some lifestyle tips to help African Americans manage their ABCs and live a long, healthy life:

- **Reach and stay at a healthy weight.** Being overweight or obese is a risk factor for heart attack and stroke.
- **Be physically active everyday.** Dancing, walking, doing household chores, or playing sports can help you lose weight and lower your blood pressure. Aim to get at least 60 minutes of physical activity, most days of the week.
- **Eat less fat and salt.** Choose lean meats, poultry, fish, nuts, fat-free or low-fat milk, and milk products. Grill or bake foods instead of frying them. Instead of salt, use herbs and seasonings to add flavor to low-fat dishes.
- **Add more fiber to your diet.** 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 to quit.
- **Take your medications as directed.** Also ask your doctor about taking daily aspirin.
- **Ask for help.** Ask your family and friends to help you stay on the right track. A little support goes a long way.

For more information on diabetes in African Americans, or about the link between diabetes and heart disease, contact the National Diabetes Education Program at <http://www.ndep.nih.gov> or 1-800-438-5383. Learn more about the ABCs of diabetes through NDEP's *Be Smart About Your Heart. Control the ABCs of Diabetes.* campaign.

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