

## For a Healthy Heart, Control the ABCs of Diabetes

by the National Diabetes Education Program



More than 20 million adults in the United States are living with diabetes, which puts them at an increased risk for developing heart disease and stroke. But there's hope. People with diabetes can learn to manage their diabetes – and cut their risk for heart attack and stroke by more than half.

Heart disease is the #1 cause of early death among people with diabetes—about 65 percent of people with diabetes die from heart disease and stroke. In fact, adults with diabetes are two to four times more likely to have heart disease or suffer a stroke than adults without diabetes.

However, 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 **A**1C 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.

### Start Making Changes Now.

For most people, making lifestyle changes isn't easy. People with diabetes need to work with their health care team to develop an action plan to bring their ABCs to their target levels. Ask your health care team:

- What are my ABC numbers? 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.
- What should my ABC numbers be? For most people with diabetes, the target levels are A1C below 7, blood pressure below 130/80, and LDL cholesterol below 100.
- What steps can I take to reach my ABC numbers? Use your action plan of lifestyle changes, and medications if needed, to help reach and maintain your target levels for the ABCs of diabetes.

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 at least 60 minutes of physical activity.** Dancing, walking, doing household chores, or playing sports most days of the week can help you lose weight and lower your blood pressure.
- **Eat foods that are low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt (sodium), and added sugars.** Choose lean meats, poultry, fish, nuts, fat-free or low-fat milk, and milk products.
- **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 more information on how to manage your diabetes, or about the link between diabetes and heart disease, contact the National Diabetes Education Program (NDEP) 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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