

Diabetes and Heart Disease

- Diabetes puts you at risk of heart disease (even if you have 'normal' looking cholesterol and no symptoms).
- This is because diabetes can change the chemical makeup of some of the substances found in the blood and this can cause blood vessels to narrow or to clog up completely.
- Heart attacks and strokes are up to four times more likely in people with diabetes
- For this reason, often people with diabetes are on blood pressure lowering medications, often in combination
- Maintaining fitness with regular physical activity combined with some weight loss can help reduce high blood pressure

Why is there an increased rate of heart disease?

Diabetes can change the chemical makeup of some of the substances found in the blood and this can cause blood vessels to narrow or to clog up completely.

Maintaining fitness with regular physical activity combined with some weight loss can help reduce high blood pressure. Blood pressure lowering medications are often required for people who have diabetes.

Symptoms

People with diabetes will not often notice chest pain. This is due to damage that occurs to the nerves to the heart. The main symptoms are **shortness of breath, dizziness or excessive fatigue** when walking or exercising. It is important to note that symptoms may be mild to severe and sometimes there may be none at all.

Examples of some other warning symptoms may be: Arm or jaw discomfort, Indigestion, Weakness, Nausea.

If you think you are having a heart attack, phone 000 IMMEDIATELY.

How can I reduce the risk?

One of the most important things to do to reduce the risk of heart disease is to meet with your doctor and/or Credentialed Diabetes Educator to discuss your individual risk factors and how to reduce them. In general terms you can reduce the risk by:

- Being physically active
- Losing weight if you are overweight
- Not smoking
- Managing blood fats

- Managing high blood pressure
- Taking medication as prescribed.

Be physically active

Regular physical activity combined with a healthy diet and achieving/maintaining a healthy weight can help to reduce the risk of a heart attack and stroke. Any type of physical activity—whether sports, household work, gardening or work-related physical activity – will help.

Aim to do at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most, if not all, days of the week. Moderate intensity is when your breathing increases noticeably – a 'little bit of puff'. Check with your doctor before beginning a physical activity program.

Lose weight

Being overweight, especially around waist is a major risk factor for heart disease. Even a 10% weight loss (e.g. a loss of 10 kgs in a 100 kg person) reduces the risk of heart disease.

Don't smoke

Smoking is a very important risk factor for heart disease compared with non-smokers. Stopping smoking at any age can significantly improve health, including reduced risk of heart diseases. Stopping smoking can be difficult but there are many programs to help you. You can:

- call Quitline on 131 848 or visit the Quitline website
- talk to your doctor about other available options.

Take medications as prescribed

As cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in people with diabetes, statins (medicines that reduce cholesterol) are usually required to manage cholesterol levels to reduce risk. The most recent research indicates that statins should be considered for all adults with diabetes, even those without any signs of heart disease. Medication, referred to as 'blood pressure lowering agents' can also help lower high blood pressure. You may require more than one agent.

Ask your doctor about aspirin to help reduce the risk of heart attack. Aspirin in low doses is sometimes recommended for people at risk of heart attacks as it makes the blood thinner and less likely to clog blood vessels.

Always take your medication as prescribed by your doctor. If you have any concerns then discuss them with doctor, do not alter your medication yourself.

Your pharmacist and Credentialed Diabetes Educator can also answer questions or concerns that you may have.

For more information: contact the [Heart Foundation](#)