

Heart and Blood Vessel Problems

Diabetes affects your whole body. Because of this, you are at risk for heart and blood vessel problems also known as **cardiovascular disease**.

Healthy Heart and Blood Vessels are important because:

- Heart and blood vessel problems are the #1 cause of illness and death for diabetics in the United States.
- Taking care of your heart and blood vessels can lower your chance of stroke, heart attack, and amputation.

How Heart and Blood Vessels Work

The blood flowing through your heart and vessels carries oxygen and nutrients to the cells. The blood also carries waste away from the cells. Waste is carried to the kidneys and removed by the bladder in the form of urine.

High blood sugar may damage the heart and blood vessels. This damage may cause blood vessels to get weak and begin to leak. It may also cause blood vessels to clog. When damaged vessels leak or clog, blood flow will slow up or stop. If blood flow is cut down or stops, cells will die. This can lead to stroke, heart attack, or amputation.

Problems that put you at high risk for heart disease are:

- overweight
- diabetes
- high blood pressure
- high blood fats - cholesterol and triglycerides
- cigarette smoking

Signs of blood flow problems to the brain:

- dizziness
- loss of vision
- slurred speech
- numbness in an arm or leg

Signs of blood flow problems to the heart:

- shortness of breath
- chest pain or pressure
- pain in left arm
- irregular heartbeat
- swollen ankles

These can be signs of serious heart problems. If you have any of these problems, call your doctor immediately or go to the nearest emergency room.

Heart and Blood Vessel Problems (continued)

Signs of blood flow problems to the feet and legs:

- cold feet and legs
- pain in the calf when walking
- slow healing cuts on feet or legs

Poor circulation to feet and legs may make it harder to treat infection. Early treatment is important.

To lower your risk of heart and blood vessel problems:

Control:

- blood sugar - under 140 mg
- hemoglobin A_{1C} under 6.5%
- blood pressure. Keep blood pressure near 130/80 mg. Ask your doctor what blood pressure level is best for you.
- total cholesterol under 200 mg.
- triglycerides under 150 mg.
- weight

Adjust your lifestyle

- eat foods low in saturated fat and salt
- exercise for 30 minutes 4 or 5 times a week
- learn and practice ways to lower your stress level
- if you smoke, stop!

There are many treatments for cardiovascular disease. Early diagnosis by your doctor is important. Visit your doctor regularly and report any problems.