

# Keeping Your Heart Healthy When You Have Diabetes

## Preventing Heart Disease

### Glucose goals

As someone with diabetes, you no doubt know how important it is to reach your blood glucose goal. Good glucose control can help you avoid problems with your heart, blood vessels, eyes, kidneys and nerves. But blood glucose control alone is not enough to keep you safe from complications.

### Blood pressure and cholesterol goals

Diabetes is a risk factor for cardiovascular disease (CVD), the leading cause of early death among people with diabetes. CVD refers to a diseased heart (cardio) and diseased blood vessels (vascular). CVD can cause heart disease, stroke, vision loss, kidney failure and nerve damage.

Two conditions that can lead to CVD are high blood pressure and high levels of low-density lipids (LDL or “bad” cholesterol).

Understanding blood pressure and cholesterol and reaching recommended goals can help prevent CVD and reward you with a healthier heart.

### Blood Pressure Basics

Blood pressure is pressure on the walls of your blood vessels as your heart pumps blood through your body.

If your blood vessels become clogged and narrowed, your blood pressure will increase. It may also increase if you are overweight, have kidney problems or drink too much alcohol. High blood pressure can run in families.

High blood pressure can lead to heart attack or stroke, eye problems and more severe kidney problems.

Blood pressure is written as two numbers separated by a slash, such as 120/80. This is often called a blood pressure reading.

- The top number shows the maximum pressure on your arteries when your heart contracts and forces blood through your body.
- The bottom number shows the minimum pressure on your arteries when your heart relaxes and refills with blood.

### Blood pressure goal

Allina Health recommends a blood pressure of 130/80 or less.

### What can help control blood pressure?

If your blood pressure is high, your provider may ask you to take a medicine called an ACE inhibitor. This type of blood pressure medicine is best for people with diabetes. In addition to lowering your blood pressure, it may help keep your kidneys healthy. Your health care provider may also suggest that you:

- lose weight
- eat more fruits and vegetables

*(over)*

- reduce the amount of salt you eat
- drink less alcohol
- get regular physical activity.

It is important that you get your blood pressure checked each time you visit your health care provider.

## Cholesterol Basics

Cholesterol is a fat-like substance in your blood. Your body makes some cholesterol to help it function properly. You may also get cholesterol from some of the foods you eat and you may inherit a tendency toward high cholesterol.

When your blood cholesterol level is too high, the cholesterol builds up on the walls of your arteries. Over time, this can:

- **block the flow of blood to your heart, depriving it of oxygen**  
(A partial blockage may result in chest pain. A total blockage will cause a heart attack.)
- **block the flow of blood to your brain, depriving it of oxygen.**  
(A total blockage will cause a stroke.)

## Cholesterol goals

The American Heart Association and American College of Cardiology recommend taking a statin medicine to protect your arteries and reduce your risk of heart disease.

## What can help control cholesterol?

You can help control your cholesterol level in the following ways:

- Eat foods low in saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol. This includes:
  - vegetables and fruits
  - whole grains
  - fat-free or low-fat dairy products

- lean protein such as chicken breast, turkey breast, fish, legumes (beans, lentils, peas) and soy
- healthful oils (olive oil, canola oil, etc.) and nuts.

Limit sweets, sugar-sweetened beverages and red meats. Limit or avoid eating “tropical” oils such as coconut, palm kernel and palm oils.

- Lose weight if you are overweight. This can lower your LDL level and raise your HDL level.
- Be physically active three to four times each week for a total of at least 150 minutes. This can also lower your LDL level and raise your HDL level.
- Take any medicine to lower your cholesterol as prescribed. Eating more healthful foods and increasing your activity level are often not enough to reach your cholesterol goals.

You may have a high cholesterol level and not yet have any signs of disease. Your health care provider will recommend how often to have your cholesterol level checked.

## Low dose aspirin

Research shows that if you have diabetes and have heart disease or have had a stroke, taking a low dose of aspirin every day may reduce your risk of more complications (problems).

Aspirin helps prevent blood clots that can block the flow of blood and lead to heart attack or stroke.

But taking aspirin is not safe for everyone, so it is important to talk with your health care provider before you start taking aspirin every day.

**Important: Taking aspirin with blood thinners may increase your risk for bleeding.**