

I have diabetes. What can I do to reduce my risk of developing heart disease or having a stroke?

If you have diabetes, it is important that you manage your disease. Keeping your blood sugar in a healthy range will help to reduce the damage to your blood vessels that leads to atherosclerosis.

The keys to managing your diabetes:

1. Follow your doctor's instructions if he or she recommends lifestyle changes or prescribes medications. Your doctor can probably refer you to a diabetes educator, nutritionist or nurse to help you.

2. Make lifestyle changes to help manage your diabetes and reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke. You should try to:

- Eat a healthy, balanced diet that is reduced in fat
- Be physically active on a regular basis
- Be smoke-free
- Learn how to manage the stress in your life

3. Monitor your blood sugar levels and try to keep them in a healthy range.

4. Have your blood pressure checked regularly.

5. Ask your doctor how frequently you should have your cholesterol checked. Your doctor will look at the amount of:

- total cholesterol in your blood
- "bad" cholesterol (Low Density Lipoprotein or LDL)
- "good" cholesterol (High Density Lipoprotein or HDL)
- triglycerides (another form of fat in the blood)

6. If you are prescribed medications for your diabetes or for other conditions such as high blood pressure or high cholesterol, take them as directed.

The good news is that managing your diabetes will also help to reduce your risk of developing high blood pressure or heart disease or having a stroke.

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For more information on how to reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke – including diet and exercise tips – visit the Heart and Stroke Foundation Web site or contact your provincial Foundation office toll-free.



www.heartandstroke.ca
1-888-HSF-INFO
1-888-473-4636

Finding answers. For life.

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Heart & Stroke

Is Diabetes Putting You at Risk of Heart Disease and Stroke?



Finding answers. For life.

About 2 million Canadians have diabetes. Many of the people with diabetes have not been diagnosed and do not know they have it.

The number of Canadians with diabetes is growing each year. Diabetes can increase your risk of developing heart disease or having a stroke. In fact, at least 65% of people with diabetes die from heart disease and stroke.

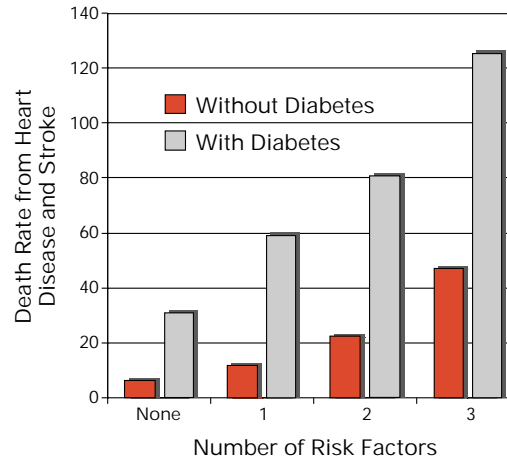
What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a chronic disease that develops when the body has a problem with a hormone called insulin. Insulin is important because it helps to move the sugar from the blood into the cells of the body, where it can be burned for energy. If there isn't enough insulin, or the insulin in your blood isn't working efficiently, this sugar (referred to as glucose) builds up in the blood. Extra sugar in the blood can damage the blood vessels in the heart (heart disease), the kidneys (renal disease) and the eyes (retinopathy). In 80% to 90% of people with diabetes, the body makes insulin but it has trouble using it effectively (*type 2 diabetes*). About 10% of cases of diabetes are caused when the body makes little or no insulin (*type 1 diabetes*).

About 2% to 4% of women who are pregnant develop diabetes during their pregnancy. Called *gestational diabetes*, the condition usually goes away after giving birth. A woman who has had gestational diabetes – and her baby – are at increased risk of developing diabetes later in life.

Why does diabetes lead to heart disease and stroke?

1. High levels of sugar in the blood damage the blood vessels and lead to the development of atherosclerosis or plaque (hardening of the arteries). Plaque in the blood vessels is a major cause of heart attacks and strokes.
2. People with diabetes often have other conditions that can lead to heart disease and stroke such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol. The following diagram shows how having diabetes can increase the risk of heart disease and stroke. The more risk factors you have, the greater your risk of heart disease and stroke.



Most significant risk factors:

- High Cholesterol
- High Blood Pressure
- Smoking

Diabetes and High Blood Pressure

When you have diabetes, you may also have – or be at risk of developing – high blood pressure. The combination can put you at high risk of developing heart disease or having a stroke. When you have diabetes, it is important that you check your blood pressure regularly. Have it taken by a health professional at least once a year. If your doctor prescribes medications to lower your blood pressure, take them as prescribed. A healthy diet, maintaining a healthy weight and regular physical activity will help to control both your blood pressure and your diabetes. For more information, check out *Your Blood Pressure Action Plan* at www.heartandstroke.ca/bloodpressure.

Diabetes and High Cholesterol

Many people with diabetes also have high cholesterol or high levels of “bad” cholesterol (Low Density Lipoprotein or LDL) or triglycerides (another form of fat). They may also have low levels of the “good” cholesterol (High Density Lipoprotein or HDL). These conditions increase the risk of developing plaque (atherosclerosis) in the blood vessels.

Ask your doctor how frequently you should have your blood cholesterol checked. Try to keep your cholesterol levels in a healthy range by eating a healthy, balanced diet that is reduced in fat and being physically active regularly (30 minutes to 1 hour a day, most days of the week). If your doctor finds that your cholesterol is high and prescribes medications, take them as directed.