



Diabetes and Heart Disease

By Diana Diekmann

People with diabetes have a higher-than-average risk of developing cardiovascular disease, to be exact, heart attack and stroke. In fact, there is a big link between diabetes, heart disease and stroke. Two out of three people with diabetes die from heart attack or stroke.

This is due to a variety of risk factors, including:

- *high blood pressure
- *high LDL (bad) cholesterol
- *low HDL (good) cholesterol
- *high triglycerides
- *smoking
- *obesity
- *lack of exercise
- *poorly controlled blood sugar levels
- *insulin resistance (a core metabolic dysfunction)



Understanding the implications that each of these risk factors have on your overall health, especially for diabetics, will help you make the necessary changes to lower your risk factors or even eliminate them.

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE.

High blood pressure makes your heart work harder than it should. Blood pressure is the force of blood against the walls of the arteries when the heart beats (systolic) and rests (diastolic). When you have diabetes, your blood sugar level is often higher than it should be. Too much sugar in the blood can cause damage to many parts of the body, including blood vessels. Weight loss and exercise are important and will lower your blood pressure. If your blood pressure doesn't come down enough with diet and exercise, you may need to take medicines that will help.

LIPID DISORDERS: high LDL, low HDL, high triglycerides.

LDL is bad cholesterol. It clogs our arteries. We don't want it. HDL is good cholesterol. It carries unneeded cholesterol away from body tissues. Triglycerides are other fats. We don't want too much. A healthy diet and exercise will help bring your numbers into a good range. If this doesn't work, you may need to take cholesterol-lowering medicines.

SMOKING.

If you smoke, quit. Smoking is bad for everyone. It damages blood vessels. Smoking is a preventable risk factor.



OBESITY.

Being overweight and heart disease often go together. Being diabetic and overweight makes it even worse. Get rid of the extra weight, especially around your mid-section and you can lower your risk of heart disease. It doesn't take a lot, even 10 pounds will help.

LACK OF EXERCISE.

Diet and exercise work hand-in-hand to help your body work properly. Exercise can help keep your blood sugar level normal and lower your risk of heart disease. You and your doctor can make an exercise plan that will work for you.



OUT-OF-CONTROL BLOOD SUGAR LEVELS.

Make sure that you check your blood sugar levels every day to make sure that your medicines and/or insulin, your diet and exercise are working to keep your blood sugar levels normal. If not, you can make the proper adjustments.

INSULIN RESISTANCE.

Insulin resistance is a condition in which the body doesn't respond efficiently to the insulin it makes. This is how it works. Shortly after we eat, our meal is broken down into simple sugars and released into the bloodstream. The pancreas releases insulin to transport this glucose to the liver and muscles. Insulin also helps turn this glucose into fatty acids and store the excess in the fat for future use. Obesity and inactivity leads to high insulin output. This elevated circulating insulin increases hunger and fat storage. This is at the expense of the pancreas, which is working extra hard to keep the glucose under control, and eventually cannot keep blood sugar levels normal. The pancreas fails and type 2 diabetes sets in.

All of these risk factors are preventable. Even taking one small step like taking a walk after dinner, not eating fast foods every day or cutting back on red meat will help. Heart disease is the leading cause of death. Don't be part of that statistic.

Come to the “Live and Learn” lectures at the Glendale YMCA on February 15, 17, 22 and 24. These lectures on Diabetes and Heart Disease are provided by Glendale Adventist Medical Center as part of their Free Heart Month Education Series.

If you or someone you know has any of the above risk factors, do not miss these important lectures. Check out our flyers inside the YMCA or online for specifics and registration information.

Make a date to hear this extremely useful information or risk having to make a date with your doctor instead.