

# Diabetes and Heart Disease

The top cause of heart disease in a person with diabetes is hardening of the arteries. This is also called atherosclerosis. This is a buildup of cholesterol and other debris, called plaques, in the blood vessels that supply oxygen and nutrition to the heart. They can break apart or burst. This causes blood clots and blocks the blood vessel. A heart attack can result.

Atherosclerosis can develop in any artery. It can result in a lack of blood to the brain. This can cause a stroke. It also can result in a lack of blood flow to the feet, hands, or arms. This can cause peripheral vascular disease (PVD).

## Symptoms of PVD include:

- Cramping in your legs while walking.
- Cold feet.
- Decreased or absent pulses in the feet or legs.
- Loss of fat under the skin of the lower parts of the legs.
- Loss of hair on the lower parts of the legs.

## How is PVD treated?

- A regular walking program (at least 3 – 4 times a week). Rest after walking.
- Special footwear.
- Aspirin therapy.\*
- Medicines.
- Quitting smoking.

People with diabetes are also at higher risk for heart failure. This is when the heart is not able to pump blood as it should. Heart failure can lead to fluid buildup in the lungs. Sometimes a result of this is difficulty in breathing. It can also lead to retaining fluid in other parts of the body (such as the legs). This can cause swelling.

## Symptoms of heart disease:

- Shortness of breath.
- Feeling faint.
- Feeling dizzy.
- Sweating.
- Pain in the shoulders, jaw, and left arm.\*\*
- Chest pain or pressure, especially during activity. It may feel like an elephant is sitting on your chest.\*\*
- Nausea.
- Indigestion.

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### Treating heart disease in persons with diabetes

There are many treatments, depending on how severe your condition is, including:

- Aspirin therapy.\*
- Diet — low in fat and cholesterol.
- Exercise for weight loss and to improve blood glucose, blood pressure, and cholesterol levels.
- Medicines.
- Surgery.

### Helping to prevent heart disease in a person with diabetes

The best way to prevent heart and blood vessel disease is to work with your doctor on the following guidelines:

- Control your blood pressure, with medicine if necessary. The goal for people with diabetes is under 140/90.
- Talk with your doctor about whether taking medication to treat your cholesterol would lower your overall risk.
- Lose weight if you are obese.
- Ask your doctor if you should take 1 aspirin a day.
- Exercise regularly.
- Eat a heart-healthy diet low in fat and cholesterol.
- Quit smoking.

\* Low-dose aspirin therapy is suggested for men and women with diabetes who are over age 30 and have a high risk for heart disease and PVD. Talk to your doctor to see if aspirin therapy is right for you. If you have certain medical conditions, aspirin therapy may not be right for you.

\*\* If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, you should call your doctor or go to the nearest emergency room right away.

This is to help you learn about your health condition. It is not to take the place of your doctor. If you have questions, talk with your doctor. If you think you need to see your doctor because of something you have read in this information, please contact your doctor. Never stop or wait to get medical attention because of something you have read in this material.

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