

HELPING YOUR DIABETES Helps Your Heart, Too

By Joy Pape,
RN, BSN, CDE, WOCN

For years, 62-year-old Jane knew she was at risk for heart disease but put off doing anything about it. Her father died at a young age from a heart attack, and her mother had a stroke due to high blood pressure. Jane acted as if nothing was going to happen to her, yet in the back of her mind, she knew she was at risk for the same problems—especially when she found out she had diabetes.

Jane was an inactive, overweight smoker. She had high blood pressure and high cholesterol levels. When she was told her blood glucose was high, she was surprised. She thought no one in her family had diabetes. But little did she know, many of her aunts, uncles and cousins had it, too.

At first she didn't believe she could change. Then Jane went to diabetes classes and learned that she didn't have to change everything in her life to improve her health. She could make one change at a time. She decided to make a series of small changes to take care of her diabetes and her heart. By doing so, she lowered her risk of a heart attack and stroke.

Diabetes raises your risk for heart disease. However, most of the things you do to manage your blood glucose are the same things experts suggest you do to help care for your heart. Jane learned that even small changes helped her become healthier. You, too, can choose something to work on from the list to the right and take your first steps toward better diabetes control and a healthier heart.



SIMPLE TIPS

To help you reach your
diabetes and heart health goals

1 Lose some weight.

If you are overweight, you don't have to lose a lot to improve your health. A 5 to 10% weight loss can make a big difference. If you weigh 200 pounds, a loss of just 10 to 20 pounds can help your diabetes and your heart.

2 Check at home.

Monitor your blood glucose, your blood pressure and your weight at home. Share the information with your health care provider at your next diabetes care visit.

3 Get more sleep.

The amount and quality of sleep you get affects your health. Try to get 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night. If you can't get that, if you snore or go to the bathroom often during the night, talk with your health care professional. You may also need to see a sleep expert to help you sleep better.

4 Move more.

Physical activity helps your diabetes, heart and a lot more. To add more activity to your day, try moving more. Get things yourself: Don't ask others to get them for you. Buy a pedometer (step counter). Wear it for three days to see how many steps you take in a normal day. Then set a goal of 500 more steps each day. Increase your goal when you're ready. Ten thousand steps is equal to about 5 miles.

5 Stop smoking.

Smoking greatly raises your risk for diabetes problems and heart disease. Don't be ashamed. Tell your health care provider that you smoke and need help quitting. Most hospitals and community centers offer special classes that can help you stop. There are also new tools to help you succeed. Learn more at smokefree.gov.

6 Care for your mouth.

There is a link among diabetes, heart disease and your oral health. See your dentist at least twice a year. Brush at least twice a day, and floss once a day.

7 Limit your salt.

That can help your blood pressure. If you slowly cut the amount of salt you use, you won't notice the change as much. Start by using half of what you usually use for one week, then cut back a bit more the next week. Finally, try to stop using your salt shaker all together. Replace salt with different herbs and spices. Food labels show the salt (sodium) content of your foods. Choose fresh and frozen foods over canned foods, which are usually higher in salt (sodium). If you want to buy canned items, choose those that are labeled "low salt" or "low sodium." If you have high blood pressure, you should take in no more than 1,500 mg of sodium each day.

