

FACT SHEET:

Looking after your heart

Looking after your heart is very important when you have diabetes. People with diabetes are 2-4 times more likely to develop heart and blood vessel (cardiovascular) disease, including heart attacks. You can reduce your risk by managing your diabetes and having regular health checks and timely treatment. Heart and blood vessel problems cause less damage when detected and treated early.

The main cause of heart disease is atherosclerosis. Atherosclerosis occurs when plaque - made up of cholesterol, other blood fats and substances - builds up inside the walls of blood vessels. This causes blood vessels to narrow and reduces or blocks blood supply to the heart and brain increasing the risk of heart attack and stroke.

Atherosclerosis is more common and develops at a younger age in people with diabetes.

How do you know if you have heart disease?

People often do not know they have heart disease until they develop symptoms. These symptoms can be:

- chest pain or heaviness
- shortness of breath
- dizziness or faintness

- arm or jaw discomfort
- weakness
- nausea.

These symptoms require urgent medical attention.

If you have had diabetes for a long time and have nerve damage, you may not notice some or any symptoms of heart disease. These symptoms are also less common in women.

What is your risk of developing heart disease?

Your doctor can assess your risk of developing heart disease. The risk is higher if you:

- have high blood pressure
- have high cholesterol
- are above the healthy weight range or carry extra weight around your waist

- are a smoker
- have a family history of vascular disease.

There are things you can do to reduce your risk of heart disease.

Looking after your heart

There are several things you can do to reduce your risk of heart disease.

Be physically active. Regular physical activity can lower blood pressure and help reduce your risk of a heart attack and stroke. A general guide is to aim to do at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic exercise every day and resistance exercise at least 2-3 times a week. If moderate or intense aerobic exercise is not suitable, light aerobic exercise such as yoga or lawn bowls may be a good alternative. It is important that your exercise program suits your individual needs. Always check with your doctor before starting a physical activity program.

Make healthy food and drink choices. Choose a wide variety of fresh foods, including fruit, vegetables, wholegrains, lean meats, and low-fat dairy foods. Ensure to include high-fibre, low glycemic index (GI) carbohydrate (carb) foods. To reduce your risk of heart disease, it is also important to limit foods high in saturated and trans fats and salt (sodium). A dietitian can help with the best food choices to reduce your risk of heart disease.

Keep blood fats in the target range. Keeping cholesterol and triglyceride levels in the target range will reduce your risk of heart disease. A general guide is:

- total cholesterol of less than 4 mmol/L
- Low Density Lipoprotein (LDL), or 'bad' cholesterol, of less than 2 mmol/L
- High Density Lipoprotein (HDL), or 'good' cholesterol, of 1 mmol/L or above
- triglycerides of less than 2 mmol/L.



These targets may change according to your type of diabetes, age, and other personal factors. Ask your doctor what your targets are. Your doctor may prescribe medications that can help manage your cholesterol and other risk factors for cardiovascular disease.

Manage high blood pressure. High blood pressure is common in people with diabetes. High blood pressure can more than double the risk of heart disease.

As a general guide, the blood pressure target for people with diabetes is 130/80 to 140/90 or lower. Your doctor will advise you on a blood pressure target to meet your health needs considering factors such as existing cardiovascular disease, kidney disease, your age or other risk factors.

Your doctor may prescribe medications that can help manage your blood pressure and reduce the risk of heart disease and other diabetes-related complications.

Try to lose weight if your weight is above the healthy range. Carrying excess weight, especially around your waist, is strongly linked to type 2 diabetes. It is also a major risk factor for heart disease. Losing as little as 5–10% of your weight (for example, 5–10 kg for a 100 kg person) can reduce your risk of heart disease. The general

guide for waist measurement is less than 94 cm for men and less than 80 cm for women. Ask your doctor for advice about your waist measurement.

Do not smoke. If you do, try to quit. Smoking is a major risk factor for sudden death from heart disease. Smokers who have diabetes have twice the risk of heart disease. Ask for help if you feel you cannot give up smoking on your own. Talk to your doctor or call the Quitline on **137 848**.

Manage your blood glucose levels. Your doctor will advise what blood glucose targets is best for you.

Discuss blood glucose monitoring at home with your doctor, diabetes nurse practitioner or diabetes educator.



More information and support

- Go to ndss.com.au to search for the 'Annual cycle of care', 'Diabetes – related complications', 'Blood glucose monitoring', 'Physical activity', 'Making healthy food choices' and other fact sheets.
- Go to ndss.com.au/annual-cycle-of-care-podcasts and listen to the Annual Cycle of Care podcast series.
- Go to ndss.com.au to access the Ready, Set, Go-Let's Move online program and to search for other NDSS programs and services in your state or territory, or online.
- Call the NDSS Helpline on **1800 637 600** and ask to speak to a dietitian.
- Go to dietitiansaustralia.org.au to find a dietitian or call Dietitians Australia on **1800 812 942**.
- Go to adea.com.au to find a diabetes educator.
- For more information about heart disease, go to heartfoundation.org.au.



Top tips

- Have regular health checks. Ask your doctor to assess your risk of heart disease.
- Always check with your doctor before starting a new exercise program.
- Discuss your blood pressure and blood fat targets with your doctor.
- Ask a dietitian for advice about best food choices to reduce your risk of heart disease.



Notes

[illegible]

The NDSS and you

Whether you have just been diagnosed with diabetes, or have been living with diabetes for a while, the NDSS provides a range of support services, information, and subsidised products to help you manage your diabetes, stay healthy and live well. For access to more resources (including translated versions), or to find out more about support services, go to **ndss.com.au** or call the NDSS Helpline on **1800 637 700**.