

How is Diabetes connected with Heart Health?

by Susan J. SMith, Ph.D, CDE

The longer a person has diabetes, the more damage is being done to the vessels. Our blood vessels carry glucose (blood sugar) and also carry blood fats or lipids (cholesterol). If a person has diabetes and heart disease in their family history, the chances of developing both diseases is greater.

We know ways we can control the blood sugars. Taking appropriate medications as prescribed by the healthcare providers, making healthy choices in foods and eating appropriate portions of food both contribute to better blood sugar control. But don't forget two of the most important factors to control blood sugars: daily physical activity and weight loss (if necessary).

Ironically, the same factors are the treatment for heart disease. Medications, healthy food choices and portions, physical activity and weight loss can also benefit the progression of heart disease.

Medications: Some of the newer medications for diabetes (GLP1 class and SGLT2 class) have demonstrated cardio-protective effects. They may maintain heart health and reduce risk of heart disease and stroke. So, for patients who don't want to continue taking more and more medications for their diabetes and/or heart disease. But there are more things you can do to better control your health issues.

Living in Central California, we have daily fresh vegetables and fruits available to us. Yet, we are far under the necessary intake of vegetables in our diet. Learn to buy more varieties of vegetables (carrots, spinach, kale, bell peppers, jicama) that have minerals and vitamins and take them to go with your lunch or to have as a snack before dinner.

Our body can only use a certain amount of food at one time. By controlling our portions at meals and eating small snacks between meals if needed, our body doesn't have to convert extra food into body fat. The carbohydrate foods (starches) in particular need to be portioned as these cause the blood sugar to rise the fastest.

Daily physical activity is an absolute necessity for managing diabetes or heart disease. Moving every 30 minutes if stationary can help use up more blood sugars. This is the best time of year to start a regular activity program – partner up with a family member or dog to commit yourself. Always check with your healthcare provider before starting an exercise program.

Following the above plan, can lead to weight loss if the patient is committed over time.

This is a lifestyle change that can improve your quality of life in the future. Take ownership of your life and health and make some changes one at a time.

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