

# Diabetes: Exams and Tests

For your diabetes care, you may see your primary care provider or a specialist 2–4 times a year. This page lists some of the regular exams and tests recommended for people with diabetes. To learn more, contact the American Diabetes Association.



## Tests and Immunizations

These should be done at least as often as stated below:

- Blood pressure check: every doctor visit
- HbA<sub>1c</sub>: every 3 months
- Cholesterol and blood lipid tests: at least every 12 months.
- Urine tests for kidney function: every 12 months
- Flu shots: once a year
- Pneumonia shots: as recommended by your healthcare provider
- Vaccinations: keep them up to date
- Other tests: as recommended by your doctor



## Regular Exams

These and other regular exams help keep you healthy.

- Foot exams. Nerve and blood vessel problems can affect your feet sooner than other parts of your body. Make sure that your healthcare provider checks your feet at every office visit.
- Eye exams. You can have problems with your eyes even if you don't have trouble seeing. An ophthalmologist (eye doctor) will give you a dilated eye exam at least once a year. If you see dark spots, see poorly in dim light, have eye pain or pressure, or notice any other problems, tell your healthcare provider right away.
- Dental exams. Gum disease (also called periodontal disease) and other mouth problems are common in people with diabetes. To help prevent these problems, see your dentist 2 or more times a year.

# Diabetes and Heart Disease

If you have diabetes, you are two to four times more likely to have heart disease than someone without diabetes. This is because most people with diabetes also have the main risk factors for heart disease. But there's good news. You can control your health risks by making some changes in your life.



**Your healthcare team will develop a treatment plan that works best for you.**

## Your Main Risk Factors

If you have diabetes, you're likely to have these risk factors for heart disease:

- High blood sugar
- High blood pressure
- High levels of lipids in your blood (such as cholesterol)

These risk factors can cause plaque (a fatty material) to build up in the arteries. This limits blood flow to the heart and may lead to a heart attack.

## Other Risk Factors

Certain lifestyle factors can raise your blood sugar, blood pressure, and lipids.

- **Smoking** damages the lining of your arteries. This allows plaque to build up in the artery walls. Smoking also constricts (tightens) the arteries, which can raise blood pressure.
- **Not being active** makes it harder for your heart to do its work. Inactivity is linked to many other risk factors, such as high blood pressure and poor cholesterol levels.
- **Being overweight** makes it harder for your body to use insulin. It also makes your heart work too hard.



**Take your medications as directed each day, even if you feel fine.**

## **Changes You Can Make**

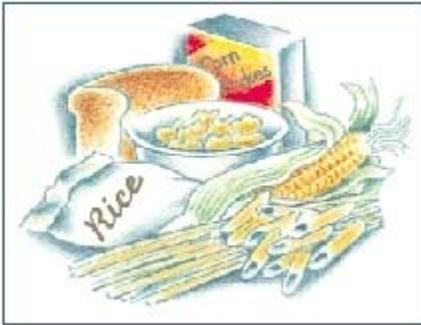
Following a few simple steps can help keep risk factors under control. Work with your healthcare team to reach your goals.

- **Testing your blood sugar** is the only way to know whether it is under control. Be sure to test your blood sugar yourself. Also get your blood tested in the lab, as directed.
- **Monitoring your blood pressure and lipid levels** can help keep them in safe ranges. Visit your healthcare team as scheduled.
- **Taking medications** can help control blood sugar, blood pressure, or cholesterol levels. If medications are prescribed, take them as directed.
- **Eating right** can reduce your risk factors and help you lose weight. Try to limit the amount of carbohydrates you eat at one time. Eat foods low in fat and cholesterol. Eat fiber, including vegetables and whole grains. And cut down on salt. A dietitian or diabetes educator can help form a meal plan that works for you.
- **Being active** can help reduce your weight, strengthen your heart, and lower your lipid levels and blood pressure. Exercise and activity are good for your whole body. Talk to your healthcare team about increasing your activity safely over time.
- **Quitting smoking** could save your life. Smoking damages the lining of the blood vessels and raises blood pressure. Smoking also affects how your body uses insulin. This makes it harder to keep blood sugar under control. If you smoke and need help quitting, talk to your healthcare team.
- **Keeping your appointments** with your healthcare provider helps you stay healthy. Go in for checkups and lab tests as scheduled.

# Diabetes and Kidney Disease

Visit your health care provider as scheduled.

Diabetes makes your body less able to use the foods you eat. As a result, glucose (the form of sugar the body uses as fuel) builds up in the blood. Over time, having too much glucose in your blood can damage blood vessels and kidneys. By controlling diabetes, you can maintain a healthy blood glucose level and slow any kidney damage. Use this sheet to help control your diabetes.

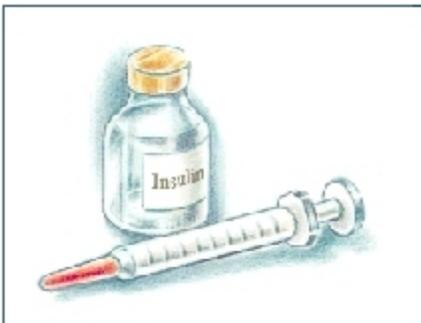


## Follow Your Diet

To get the most energy from the foods you eat and feel your best, you may have to follow a special diet. Work closely with your health care team to design a meal plan that is right for you.

## You May Also Need To:

- Eat less protein.
- Drink less fluid.
- Limit sodium (salt) intake.
- Eat foods that are low in phosphorus and potassium.



## Take Insulin and Diabetes Medication as Directed

Insulin is a hormone that helps your body use glucose. You may inject insulin under your skin to increase your body's supply or take pills to help your body secrete more insulin. The stage of your kidney disease can reduce the amount of insulin you need. Talk with your doctor if your blood glucose level is often too low.



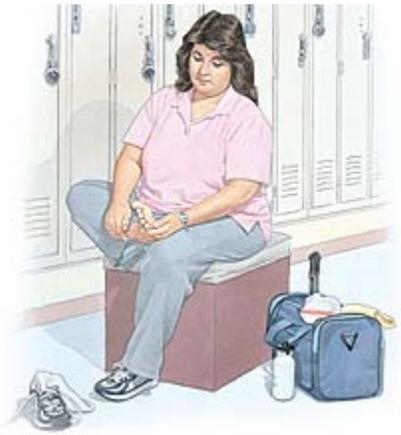
## **Stay Active**

Exercise helps the body use glucose. For best results:

- Talk with your doctor before starting a fitness program.
- Ask your doctor how often you should exercise and for how long.
- Your doctor may be able to suggest activities that will help you feel your best.
- Eat 1–2 hours before you exercise.

# Diabetes: Keeping Feet Healthy

When you have diabetes, your feet need special care. Even a small foot problem can become very serious. Practice self-care to protect your feet and keep them healthy.



Inspect your feet every day for signs of a problem.

## Take Special Care

- Inspect your feet daily for problems such as hot spots, blisters, cracks, or dry skin. Use a mirror to see the bottoms of your feet. Or, ask for help.
- Manage your diabetes. Foot problems are less likely to develop if you control your diabetes.
- Avoid walking barefoot, even indoors.
- Wash feet with warm water and mild soap. Dry well—especially between toes.
- Don't trim corns or calluses yourself. Ask your doctor about cutting your toenails.
- Use moisturizing cream or lotion for dry skin. Don't use it between toes.

## Have Regular Checkups

Foot problems can develop quickly. So be sure to follow your healthcare team's schedule for regular checkups. During office visits, take off your shoes and socks as soon as you get in the exam room. Ask your healthcare provider to examine your feet for problems. This will make it easier to find and treat small skin irritations before they get worse. Regular checkups can also help keep track of the blood flow and feeling in your feet. If you have neuropathy (lack of feeling in your feet), you may need to have checkups more often.

## Wear Proper Footwear

Wearing proper footwear is very important. If areas of your feet have been damaged by too much pressure, your healthcare provider may recommend changing your footwear. In some cases, avoiding high heels or tight work boots may be all that's needed. Or, your healthcare provider may recommend special shoes or custom inserts. These help protect your feet and keep existing irritations from getting worse. If you need special footwear, ask your healthcare provider if you qualify for Medicare's diabetic shoe program.

## **Make Sure Shoes and Socks Fit**

Any pair of shoes—new or old—should feel comfortable as soon as you put them on. Buy shoes at the end of the day, when your feet are larger. Make sure they provide support without feeling too loose. Be sure socks fit, too. To protect your feet, avoid shoes that are open-toed or open-heeled. If you have questions about what kinds of shoes and socks are best, talk to your healthcare team.

## **Get Regular Exercise**

Regular exercise improves blood flow in your feet. It also increases foot strength and flexibility. Gentle exercises, like walking or riding a stationary bicycle, are best. You can also do special foot exercises. Just be sure to talk with your healthcare provider before starting any exercise program. Also mention if any exercise causes pain, redness, or other signs of foot problems.

**Note:** If you have any kind of break in the skin of your foot or ankle, keep the area clean. Then call your doctor—especially if the area doesn't appear to be healing.