

## Diabetes and Your Heart—on Valentine’s Day and Everyday

Being diagnosed with diabetes can be scary and confusing. There is a lot to learn, including new ways of doing things. One of the worrisome things you learn is that people with diabetes are at much higher risk for heart attack and stroke. But, while there are leading risk factors that you can’t change—such as family history or age—you can affect other risk factors and lower the chances of having a heart attack or stroke.

Let’s look at the major risk factors that are manageable:

- Overweight
- Inactive
- Smoker
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol levels
- Having diabetes

Do you see any common threads among manageable risks? Being inactive can lead to overweight, which in turn can lead to high cholesterol levels and high blood pressure, and ultimately, diabetes.

So, let’s talk a little about overweight. This is a topic that we’ve been hearing a lot about lately. The latest figures indicate more than 9 million US children are now overweight, triple the number since 1976. The diseases of our grandparents are now the diseases of our children and grandchildren. We are seeing children being diagnosed with diseases usually seen among adults, including high blood pressure and cholesterol (which lead to heart disease, the nation’s number one cause of death) and type 2 diabetes, which used to be known as adult-onset diabetes because it was rarely seen among children.

Once we acknowledge the health threats associated with being overweight, we need a realistic plan that makes sense. Make small changes in your food choices and watch your portion sizes. Eat more vegetables (they really are good for you!); choose smaller portions of carbohydrates and meats; include foods high in fiber; and switch to skim or one percent milk.

A pound is 3500 calories. Giving up three teaspoons of sugar and a piece of bread a day translates into a painless loss of 16 pounds in a year. Switch to a diet drink or water with lunch instead of that large soda and you can lose a whopping 34 pounds this year. Combine these small changes for a grand total of 50 pounds lost in one year! That 50 pound weight loss could lower both blood pressure and cholesterol levels, and will have a dramatic impact on your blood glucose levels too.

The second most crucial change for overall health is to become more active. Eating less is just half of the “move more, eat less” equation to better health. This doesn’t mean you have to take up tennis, or jog, or clock regular hours at a gym. It does mean you have to put on comfortable shoes and move. Be active for 30 minutes five days a week—walk 20 minutes at lunchtime and 10 minutes before or after work (the dog will be grateful) if you can’t commit to 30 minutes at a time. Rake those leaves, mow the lawn, wash the car, hang the laundry out to dry, put on some loud music and dance in the living room. Do whatever you can to move 30 minutes a day. You’ll lose another eight pounds in a year

and maybe more importantly, you'll relieve stress, lower your blood glucose, and feel younger and better.

Make a couple of small changes and you will have reduced those risk factors that at first glance seem insurmountable. Prevention of type 2 diabetes is proven and possible.

For more information and materials on type 2 diabetes prevention and creating a healthier plate, call Susan Wilk at Cornell Cooperative Extension at 631-727-7850. Visit Cornell's website [www.cce.cornell.edu/suffolk](http://www.cce.cornell.edu/suffolk) for diabetes management class information and the Long Island Diabetes Coalition at [www.longislanddiabetes.org](http://www.longislanddiabetes.org) for more information.

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