

Diabetes Complications: Large Blood Vessel Disease

When you have Type 2 diabetes, high blood glucose levels over time can damage the large blood vessels throughout your entire body.

Large blood vessels carry oxygen and nutrients to your heart, brain, legs, feet, arms and hands to keep them healthy and working well.

But when you have Type 2 diabetes, your blood vessels also carry high levels of glucose, a form of sugar, high levels of blood fats like cholesterol and triglycerides, and higher than normal levels of insulin, all of which cause damage to the walls of the vessels.

Over a period of time, even people with well controlled diabetes can have damage that may cause serious long term health problems. And if you also have high blood pressure, how quickly that damage happens to your blood vessels can increase.

High blood glucose and blood fats can contribute to the formation of plaque on the inside walls of the large blood vessels. This process, known as Atherosclerosis, causes the walls of the blood vessel to stiffen and get weak. As plaque builds up blood flow is greatly reduced or completely blocked. Blood clots can form.

Both can lead to heart attack, stroke and poor circulation.

In fact, heart disease is the leading cause of death among people with diabetes.

Large blood vessel damage is a serious complication of Type 2 diabetes that should not be ignored. People with diabetes are twice as likely to have a heart attack or stroke as people without diabetes.

But this does not have to happen. Many of the steps you take to control your blood glucose will also go a long way to help reduce your risk of heart disease, stroke and poor circulation.

That's because many of the unhealthy lifestyle habits that led to your Type 2 diabetes in the first place, can also increase your risk of large blood vessel disease.

Keep in mind that your risk for large blood vessel disease increases the longer you have diabetes and as you get older.

Smoking or using tobacco; high cholesterol and/or triglycerides; high blood pressure; and stress can also increase your risk of large blood vessel disease.

With the help of your diabetes care team, use your management plan to keep your blood glucose levels in control while at the same time reducing your risk of large blood vessel disease and the serious health problems it can cause.

Make healthy food choices. Get regular physical activity. Monitor your blood glucose and take medications if necessary.

Keep all your appointments for both healthcare check-ups and lab tests.

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If you do experience any signs or symptoms of large blood vessel disease, let your diabetes care team know right away so you can get the treatment you need as soon as possible.

Call 911 if you notice: Chest pain or discomfort; nausea, lightheadedness, or vomiting; jaw, neck or back pain; pain in your arm or shoulder; or shortness of breath; all of which could be a sign of a heart attack.

Take note though, women may experience symptoms of a heart attack differently than men, so listen to your body and all the warning signs.

Also call 911 if you notice: Temporary numbness or weakness on one side of the body; one side of the face drooping or numb; slurred speech; dimness or vision loss in one or both eyes; or sudden severe headache – all of which could be signs of a stroke.

When you have Type 2 Diabetes you are at an increased risk of large blood vessel disease. But you can take control and reduce your risk. Make healthy lifestyle changes and follow your management plan to maintain good health for your future.