

Women and Heart Disease: Weight Management, Diabetes and Exercise

Obesity, diabetes and physical inactivity all increase your risk for heart disease. Let's take a look at how each of these risk factors affects your heart.

More than half of people over age 65 with diabetes, die from some form of heart disease.

Diabetes means that your body doesn't make enough insulin or can't use the insulin it has efficiently. This can lead you to have too much glucose, a form of sugar in your blood.

Too much glucose can lead to damage of the artery walls and increases your risk for heart attack and stroke.

"Diabetes is a disease that contributes to systemic inflammation in the body and also makes the blood vessels more prone to atherosclerosis or the buildup of cholesterol in the blood-vessel walls."

If you already have diabetes, it is important you take steps to manage it. Meet with your healthcare provider to learn all you can about managing your diabetes and keeping your blood glucose in a healthy range for you.

Being overweight or obese increases your risk for heart disease, as well as for heart disease risk factors like diabetes, especially if the extra pounds are around your waist.

Both healthy eating and exercise will help manage your weight, but you need to approach losing weight in a safe way. Talk to your healthcare provider about a healthy weight loss goal.

Your heart is a muscle. And like other muscles, it needs to be worked in order to stay strong.

Physical inactivity, or lack of regular exercise can contribute to high cholesterol, high blood pressure and weight gain.

The American Heart Association recommends you get at least 150 minutes of moderate or 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity, above your normal household chores, per week to protect your heart.

If you are overweight, have diabetes, or are physically inactive there are ways to lower your risk of heart disease.

Small lifestyle changes!

Develop a good habit that you look forward to, which could mean time by yourself or perhaps with friends if you wish.

You could start by controlling your portion sizes at meals and when snacking.

Controlling your portion sizes can help you gain greater control over the number of calories you eat, which in turn can help you gain control of your weight and help you manage diabetes.

Another way to reduce these risk factors is to include physical activity in your day.

A consistent schedule of exercise that works for you, can go a long way to reducing these risk factors and helping you become more heart healthy.

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“A little bit of exercise is good, even if you just get out and walk around the block a couple times.”

You may not be able to start exercising for long periods of time right away. Gradually increase the amount of activity you do, and the intensity. And aim to get that 150 minutes per week.

“Exercise does not necessarily mean joining the gym or doing CrossFit or something real aggressive. It could be walking 30 minutes 5 days a week around the neighborhood or involving yourself in something less vigorous like swimming or bicycle riding.”

Talk with your healthcare provider about ways that you can get active and reach your goals.

“Well, we enjoy dancing and a lot of it. It’s a good form of exercise and we try to do that probably, mm, maybe two- three times a week at least in addition to walking.”

Like pieces of a puzzle, all the pieces of your lifestyle make up your risk of heart disease. If you are overweight, have diabetes or are inactive you are at an increased risk for heart disease.

Start lowering your risk factors today by making small changes like controlling your portion sizes and adding exercise to your day. You and your heart will be better for it.