

Control your diabetes *For Life:*

Circular 569 I

Preventing Complications

■ Health problems associated with diabetes can be prevented.

■ Too much glucose in the blood can damage blood vessels and nerves.

■ Eyes, kidneys, heart, and feet are most commonly affected by diabetes.

■ Regular visits to your health care provider can reveal damage from diabetes before you notice problems.

■ Diabetes complications develop earlier if you smoke or drink alcoholic beverages.

■ High blood pressure makes damage from diabetes to eyes and kidneys worse.

People who have diabetes often experience other health problems. The most common problems (or **complications**) people with diabetes experience are vision loss, kidney disease, heart disease, and amputations. High glucose levels in the blood over time can damage nerves and blood vessels. Complications occur as blood vessels become blocked, or break and bleed, and nerves lose the ability to transmit impulses through parts of the body.



The most important actions you can take to prevent or postpone diabetes complications include:

- controlling your blood glucose levels
- eating a healthy diet
- getting regular physical activity
- visiting your health care provider regularly to check for problems with your eyes, kidneys, heart, and feet.

Eyes

People with diabetes are at risk for developing eye disease. Many people do not notice symptoms—there is no pain, no blurred vision in the early stages of the disease. Vision problems often are not noticed until the disease is well advanced, and vision cannot be restored. Early detection and treatment is important to prevent vision loss. You can reduce your risk of vision loss by having a **dilated eye exam annually** to detect problems early. If you have high blood pressure, damage to small blood vessels in the eyes from diabetes can worsen. **Keep your blood pressure under control** and **don't smoke** to help prevent further damage to fragile blood vessels in the eyes.

Kidneys

High blood glucose levels and a diet with too much protein can damage kidneys over time. The kidneys will lose their ability to filter blood and may fail altogether. When kidneys



College of Agriculture
and Home Economics
Cooperative Extension Service

Raylene McCalman, MS, RD, LD, CDE
Extension Diabetes Coordinator

Martha Archuleta, PhD, RD
Extension Food and Nutrition Specialist

fail, waste products need to be artificially filtered from the blood (**dialysis**) to stay alive. Each year, your health care provider should check your kidneys by testing blood and urine. Early stages of kidney problems can be treated with medications and by decreasing protein in the diet. High blood pressure also is linked to kidney disease. Your provider may prescribe blood pressure medicine to help protect your kidneys.

Heart

Heart disease is the most common cause of death for people who have diabetes. If you have diabetes, you are more likely to have too much fat (**lipids, cholesterol and triglycerides**) in the blood. These fats can clog blood vessels, blocking blood flow throughout the body, including the heart. The heart muscle can be damaged (heart attack) when there is not enough blood flowing to it. High blood pressure often occurs with heart disease. You can help prevent heart disease by:

- eating a healthy diet (low in fat and sodium, high in fiber)
- getting daily physical activity
- maintaining a healthy weight
- quitting smoking
- asking your health care provider to check your blood pressure and weight at every visit and your blood cholesterol and triglycerides at least once a year.

Legs and Feet

Damage to nerves and blood vessels from uncontrolled diabetes can affect many different parts of the body. Most often, damage occurs in the legs and feet, causing numbness, tingling, cramping, burning, or pain. Nerve damage in other parts of the body can affect the heart, stomach and digestive tract, veins and arteries, bladder, and sexual function.

Smoking and alcohol use can worsen circulation and nerve problems.

Amputations often result from foot injuries that you do not even feel. These injuries can quickly become infected and are difficult to heal. **Check your feet** daily for signs of swelling, redness, or breaks in the skin. **Wear comfortable shoes that fit well** to protect your feet from injury. Call your health care provider if you notice any problems with your feet.

Where to Go for More Information

■ Your health care provider

■ American Diabetes Association:
1-800-DIABETES

■ National Diabetes Education Program:
1-800-438-5383 or visit the World Wide Web at **ndep.nih.gov** or **www.cdc.gov**

■ Your county Extension office

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