

heart health news

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The obesity and diabetes connection

by Mary Robinson, F.N.P., B.C., Rutland Regional Diabetes and Endocrinology Center

Obesity. You've read about it and have seen news reports on what an epidemic it is. In fact, more 32 percent of Americans are overweight, and another 23 percent are considered obese. Then there's diabetes, another disease of epidemic proportions. More than 20 million people in the United States have diabetes, with an estimated 23 million cases by the year 2025.

Is there a correlation between these two epidemics? Absolutely. As the nation's waistline grows, so does the number of people with diabetes. The reason? Insulin resistance. Insulin is a hormone made by the pancreas. It helps sugar (our body's fuel source) get from our bloodstream into the cells, or

engines of our body. Obesity, particularly belly weight, makes the body resistant to insulin so it can't work as well and eventually can cause blood sugar levels to rise. In addition, a lack of physical activity contributes to the problem. Increasing activity, even in the absence of weight loss, will help insulin to work better.

Before a diabetes diagnosis, other health problems related to insulin resistance, including insulin resistance syndrome (also known as Syndrome X or metabolic syndrome); heart disease related to high blood pressure; low HDL cholesterol (the healthy type of cholesterol); and high triglycerides

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{ NEWS AND TIPS FOR THE HEART-CONSCIOUS }



Aspirin for heart attacks: chew or swallow?



Doctors recommend that people who are having a heart attack take an aspirin to stop blood clots from forming in the arteries. But should you take a chewable aspirin? A tablet? Something else? In a small study from the University of California, researchers had 14 people ages 20 to 61 swallow regular aspirin, chew regular aspirin or take chewable aspirin. Their blood was then checked to see which technique led to the highest levels of the drug in the body. The result? Those who took the chewable aspirin had the highest levels compared to people who either swallowed or chewed whole regular pills. So before you stock up on aspirin, ask your health-care provider if you should switch to chewable—it just might save your life.

Laughter really is good medicine

Got diabetes? Lighten up. Laughter could help you improve your cholesterol levels and lower your risk of heart attack. In a small study from Loma Linda University, 20 adults with type 2 diabetes were assigned to one of two groups. Both groups had high blood pressure and high cholesterol and were taking standard diabetes medications, high blood pressure medicines and cholesterol-lowering drugs. Half were asked to watch something they thought would make them laugh, such as sitcoms or funny movies, for at least 30 minutes a day. After a year, researchers



measured both groups' cholesterol and their C-reactive protein (CRP), an inflammation indicator linked to heart disease. The laughers had a 26 percent increase in "good" HDL cholesterol. The non-laughers only saw a 3 percent increase. Harmful CRP was lowered by 66 percent in the laughter group but by just 26 percent in the non-laughter group. It seems a little humor can lower bad chemicals and increase good chemicals. And that's nothing to laugh at!

DASH your way to a healthier heart

The Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet, designed to help prevent and lower high blood pressure, seems to reduce the risk of heart failure in women. The diet features plenty of fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy foods and whole grains and a low intake of total and saturated fat. In a study in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*, researchers analyzed data and dietary habits from more than 36,000 women. They found that women who most closely adhered to the DASH diet had a 37 percent lower rate of heart failure than women with the lowest DASH diet scores.



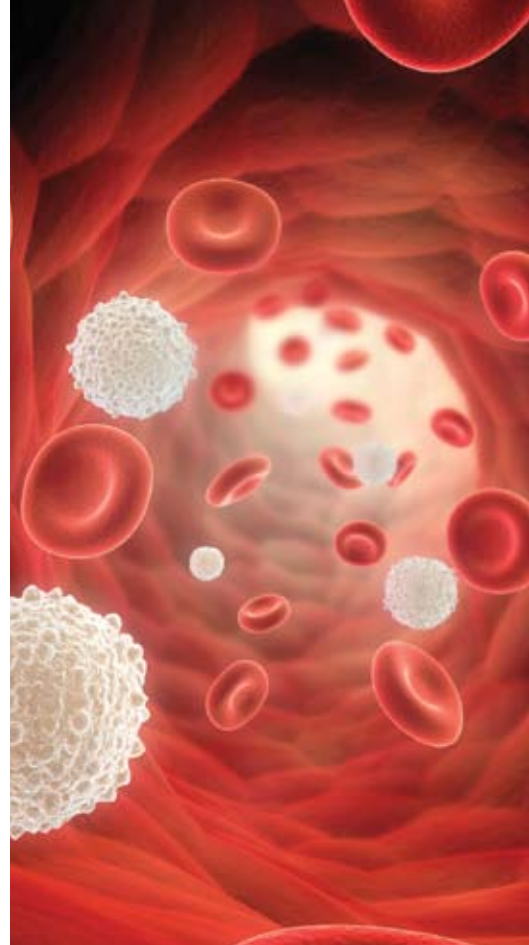
▶ DID YOU KNOW?

- ▶ New recommendations state that the clot-busting drug tPA can safely treat some stroke patients for up to four-and-a-half hours after symptoms begin, not just three hours, as previously believed.
- ▶ Every 34 seconds or so, someone in this country has a heart attack.
- ▶ A typical fatty fast-food lunch contains 1,660 calories and costs \$6.79. A brown-bag healthy lunch has just 530 calories and costs \$3.61.

Plaque attack

A few years ago, the only plaque you worried about was the kind on your teeth. But for millions of Americans, a far more dangerous type of plaque lurks on the walls of the arteries that deliver blood to the heart. The plaque, which is made up of fat, cholesterol and other substances, builds up (a condition called atherosclerosis) and restricts blood flow, leading to chest pain, shortness of breath and other problems. Even worse, small bits of plaque can break off and travel through the bloodstream, blocking blood flow and causing a heart attack or stroke.

This deadly process may begin as early as childhood, getting worse as we age. It usually leads to coronary heart disease, the leading cause of death in this country. The good news: You can prevent this far-too-common condition by taking the following heart-smart steps:



► **Aim low.** When it comes to your diet, seek out low-fat, low-cholesterol and low-salt foods. That means fresh fruit, vegetables, whole grains and low- or nonfat

milk, yogurt, cheese and other dairy products. You also want to keep your blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol levels low with diet, medication or both.



► **Go fish.** Adding more fish to your diet can help prevent plaque buildup. Try to eat at least two servings a week of baked—not fried—salmon, tuna or mackerel.

Don't like fish? Pop a fish oil supplement.



► **Run—or walk, bike or hike—for the hills.** Choose any type of heart-pumping exercise that you enjoy and will do for at least 30 minutes a day, and do it.



► **Drop pounds.** Bump up your exercise to 60 to 90 minutes a day and stick to that healthy diet to lose excess weight and reduce your risk of atherosclerosis.



► **Quit smoking.** This unhealthy habit raises your risk of atherosclerosis and many other heart and lung conditions. The sooner you quit, the better.



► **Raise a glass or two—no more.** Drinking a reasonable amount of alcohol (up to one drink a day for women; two for men) may reduce the risk, but overdoing it can raise the risk. If you don't drink alcohol, don't start now, but keep these guidelines in mind if you do.



► **Ask about aspirin.** For some people, taking daily aspirin can reduce the risk of heart attack or stroke. Ask your healthcare provider if you would benefit

from a daily dose. ♥

TAKE A DEEP BREATH

Learning to manage stress and anger may reduce your risk of atherosclerosis. Studies have found that chronic stress can cause thickening of the arteries. To de-stress, get a good night's sleep and practice muscle relaxation and deep breathing.

The exercise equation

How much do you really need to move to lose weight?

You've heard it over and over: The key to losing weight is to eat less and move more. But exactly how active do you need to be, and what counts as exercise?

BURN, BABY, BURN!

Your goal is to burn as many calories as you can. The formula to remember: For every 3,500 calories you burn through exercise, you'll drop 1 pound. If you weigh 160 pounds, you'll burn 584 calories an hour jogging (if you weigh more than that, you'll burn more calories; less than that and you'll burn fewer). Do it daily, and you'll drop a little more than a pound a week ($584 \times 7 = 4,088$ calories). If you're not up for jogging, just walk: If you weigh 160 pounds, you'll burn 277 calories walking for an hour at a 3.5-miles-per-hour pace.

GET STARTED

Of course, not all exercise is equal: For a 160-pound person, an hour of bowling or ballroom dancing burns 219 calories; playing basketball, 584. Ideally, you want to burn 250 calories a day through exercise and eliminate 250 calories a day from your diet to lose a pound a week. Be more active and cut more calories and you'll lose more weight, but don't go overboard. Experts say it's unhealthy to lose more than 2 pounds a week.

Current guidelines state that for general health, each week you should do at least:

▶ two-and-a-half hours of moderate aerobic activity (brisk walking, ballroom dancing, housework)

or

▶ an hour-and-a-half of vigorous activity (jogging, playing tennis, mowing the lawn with a push-mower)

and

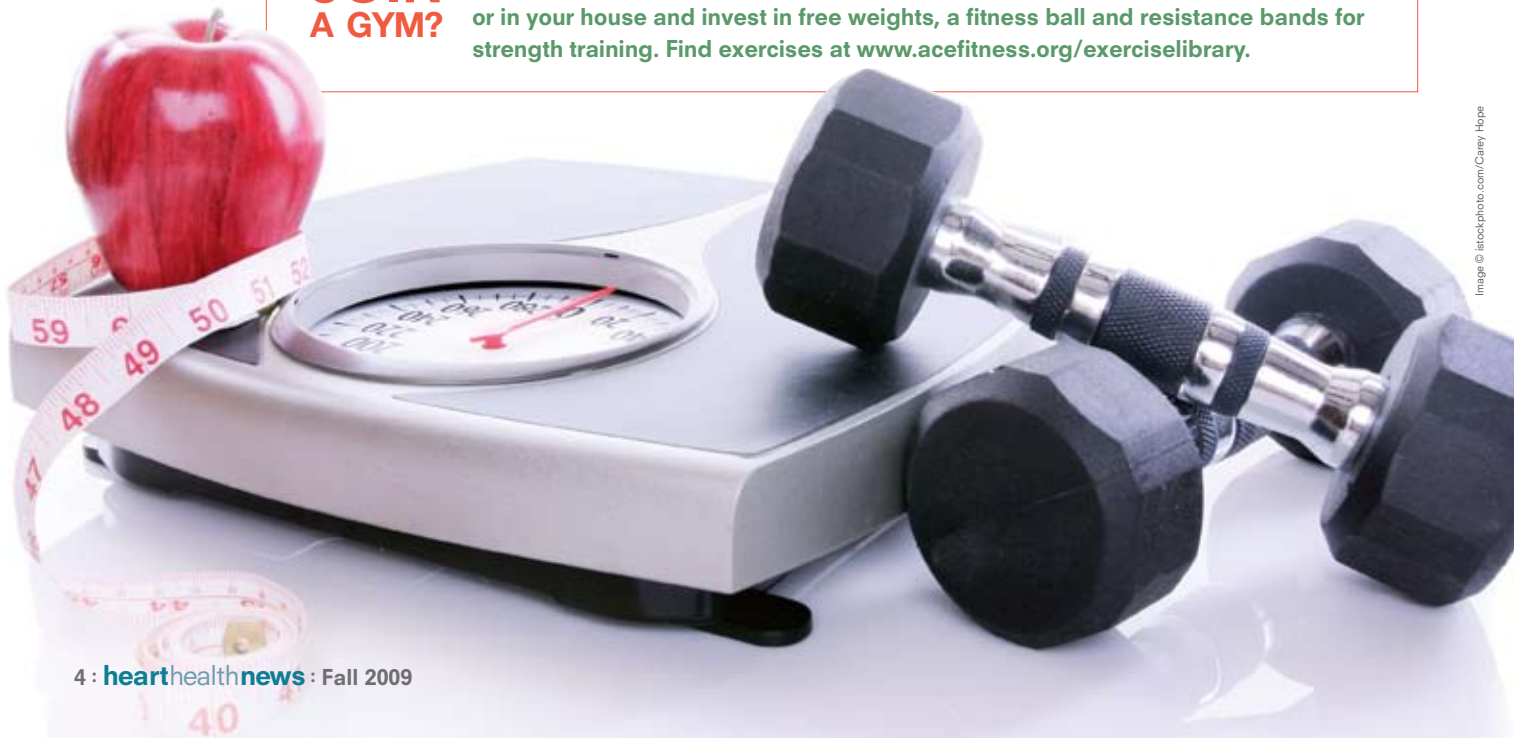
▶ strength training activities (push-ups, sit-ups, bicep curls) two or more days

Exactly how you do it is up to you. You can break those two-and-a-half hours of moderate activity into five half-hour workouts, two-and-a-half one-hour workouts or 10 fifteen-minute workouts.

To lose weight or keep off any weight you've already lost, you need to be even more active, exercising at a moderate level for at least 60 to 90 minutes a day. ♥

SHOULD YOU JOIN A GYM?

Sign up only if you think you'll go. Some people find the mirrored walls, crowds of super-fit exercisers and enormous equipment intimidating. The good news: You don't need a gym to get in shape. Buy some exercise DVDs or borrow them from the library, find workouts on television, take a daily walk, climb the stairs at work or in your house and invest in free weights, a fitness ball and resistance bands for strength training. Find exercises at www.acefitness.org/exerciselibrary.



Dispelling diabetes myths

Some 24 million people in this country have diabetes. Yet myths surrounding the condition abound. Read on for the truth:

MYTH People who have diabetes should eat diabetic foods.

► **Truth:** People with diabetes should eat the same foods that everyone else is supposed to eat: whole grains, fruits and vegetables and not much salt and sugar. Diabetic foods are not only more expensive than their conventional counterparts, they also often contain sugar alcohols, which can have a laxative effect.

MYTH If you have diabetes, you'll know it.

► **Truth:** Nearly 6 million people have diabetes and don't know it. That's because the symptoms can be vague: having to go to the bathroom frequently; being hungrier, thirstier or sleepier than usual; unusual weight loss; irritability; and blurry vision. And some people have no symptoms at all. If your healthcare provider thinks you might have diabetes, he or she will likely give you a fasting blood glucose test. For the test, you'll have to fast for several hours and your healthcare provider will draw blood to test your glucose levels.

MYTH If a family member has type 2 diabetes, you'll develop it, too.

► **Truth:** If you have a family history of type 2 diabetes, you are more likely to develop it, but you can take steps to ward off the condition. If you're carrying around extra pounds, losing weight is the best thing you can do. In one study of people with pre-diabetes or other risk factors, those who lost 5 percent to 7 percent of their body weight (just seven-and-a-half to ten-and-a-half pounds for a 150-pound person) reduced their risk.

MYTH Diabetes always leads to serious health problems, like amputation and stroke.

► **Truth:** Uncontrolled, diabetes can be dangerous. But you can take steps to stay healthy, such as sticking to a nutritious diet, getting regular exercise, quitting smoking and seeing your doctor regularly. Pay special attention to your feet and let your healthcare provider know if you have an injury, sore or wound that won't heal. About 5 percent of people with diabetes lose a foot or toe. ♥

The obesity and diabetes connection

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(a bad type of fat in the bloodstream that clogs up blood vessels) can occur.

The bottom line is that we need to exercise more and eat fewer calories to lose weight. That's easier said than done, especially when surrounded by an abundance of high-fat foods and a lifestyle that requires minimal physical activity. The good news is that even a modest weight loss (10 pounds to 20 pounds) can dramatically reduce your diabetes risk. To start:

1. Read food labels and limit foods that contain more than 5 grams of fat per serving. If a food is high in fat, cut back on the portion size, eat it less often or try something lower in fat.
2. Cut back on portion sizes of everything except vegetables—eat extra vegetables to fill your plate. Limit fats like salad dressing, butter and margarine added to veggies.
3. Buy lean cuts of meat and trim any fat from the meat before cooking it.
4. Avoid high-fat dairy foods. Try switching to low-fat milk by mixing high-fat milk with skim milk.
5. Cut back on “empty” calories, such as sweetened beverages, desserts and candy.
6. Limit high-fat snack foods. Snack on fresh fruits, vegetables, low-fat crackers or low-fat yogurt instead.
7. Gradually increase your activity (once you have discussed activity goals with your doctor).

Try making just one change per week. Remember: Slow changes are the ones that last. Dietary changes need to be permanent changes.

Whether it's diabetes, heart disease or wanting to prevent other health problems related to obesity, you can reduce your health risks. Your healthcare provider can give you additional suggestions. There is no time like today to start! ♥

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TRUE OR FALSE

If you want to be heart healthy, you have to be heart smart. Test your knowledge by answering true or false to the following statements (answers below).

STATEMENTS

1. After a heart attack, to help your heart heal you should avoid exercise. T F
2. You can have a stroke and not even know it. T F
3. Drinking alcohol is a surefire way to lower your risk of heart problems. T F
4. Children should have their blood pressure checked regularly. T F

ANSWERS

1. **FALSE:** Cardiac rehabilitation, a medically supervised exercise program, helps you get your strength back and reduces your risk of another heart attack. The programs, which include aerobic and strength training exercise, usually begin while you're still in the hospital.
2. **TRUE:** A mini-stroke, or a transient ischemic attack (TIA), happens when a blood clot clogs an artery for a short time, and the brain doesn't get enough blood. Most TIAs last just a few minutes, and don't damage the brain. But they do signal that you may have a more serious stroke down the road.
3. **FALSE:** Yes, drinking alcohol in moderation (one drink a day for women; two for men) has been linked to reduced heart disease risk, but more research is needed to confirm the findings. Plus, drinking too much can raise your triglycerides (a type of fat in the blood) and blood pressure and increase your risk of stroke, arrhythmia (irregular heartbeats) and sudden cardiac death.
4. **TRUE:** As more children become overweight, high blood pressure is becoming more common. So experts now recommend that kids get their blood pressure checked starting at age 3 (sooner if they have other risk factors).



Tiny ticker, big problem

The ins and outs of congenital heart defects

A newborn baby's heart is about the size of his or her fist, and it beats some 100,000 times a day. But sometimes a baby is born with a less-than-perfect heart. When there's an abnormality in the heart's structure, it's called a congenital heart defect. There are many, many types of defects, some minor (a hole in the inside walls of the heart), some more serious, such as a heart that's missing chambers or valves. Most heart defects occur early in pregnancy, before a woman even knows she's pregnant. Here is some need-to-know info on the condition:

WHAT CAUSES THESE HEART DEFECTS?

In most cases, doctors don't know what causes these problems. They may be hereditary,

or they may be linked to other diseases. For example, half of babies with Down syndrome also have a congenital heart defect. One study found that women who smoked early in pregnancy were more likely to have a baby with a heart defect. Some medicines, alcohol and illegal drugs may also raise the risk.

ARE THEY TREATABLE?

Many congenital heart defects don't need any treatment, but others can be treated with surgery or other procedures. Luckily, many children go on to live normal, active lives, like the 1 million adults in this country living with congenital heart defects. Some may have developmental delays or learning problems, and may need to see a heart specialist regularly. ♥

Is it a heart attack?

In the movies, when someone has a heart attack, he or she clutches his or her chest and keels over. Everyone knows what's happening, and people jump into action. In real life, it's not always that dramatic. Many heart attacks start slowly and may not even include chest pain. Often, people think their symptoms are a sign of something else, like heartburn, or they're embarrassed to cause a scene, so they do nothing. Even people who've already had a heart attack may not recognize their symptoms, as each attack can be dramatically different. So most people having a heart attack wait too long to get medical help. That delay can lead to serious heart damage and even death.

If you're with someone who you suspect is having a heart attack, you need to take action quickly. What to do first? Read on.

► **Know the signs.** Sure, chest pain is the most common symptom, but someone having a heart attack may also have pain in the arms, back, neck, jaw or stomach; shortness of breath; and other symptoms such as nausea or light-headedness. He or she may even break out in a cold sweat.

► **Pick up the phone immediately.** Even if the person assures you it's not a heart attack, call for emergency medical help within the first five minutes of the attack. The faster you move, the faster your loved one will receive treatment, and many heart attack treatments work best when given within an hour of the attack.

► **Get a ride.** You're better off taking an ambulance than driving the person to the hospital, because emergency workers can start treatment en route to the hospital, re-start the heart if it stops beating

and relay the patient's information to the emergency department before you get there. That's why people having a heart attack who take an ambulance to the hospital tend to get treated faster.

► **Ask about medication.** Some people with a heart condition carry nitroglycerin pills, to be taken in case of a heart attack. And some doctors recommend chewing an aspirin during a heart attack.

Don't put off calling for emergency help to offer these pills, but ask the person on the phone if you should give your loved one either drug. ♥

CHECK IT OUT ONLINE!

Download a free heart attack survival plan at www.nhlbi.nih.gov/actitime/saha/surv_pln.htm.

►►► Many heart attacks start slowly and may not even include chest pain. ◀◀◀



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Warning Signs of Stroke

Call 911 and come to the Emergency Department if you or someone you're with is having one or more of these warning signs:

- **Sudden numbness or weakness in face, arm or leg – especially on one side of the body.**
- **Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding.**
- **Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes.**
- **Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination.**
- **Sudden severe headache with no known cause.**

Not all warning signs occur with every stroke. Don't ignore symptoms if they go away. Still seek medical help.



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