February is American Heart Month, and unfortunately, most of us know someone who has had heart disease or stroke. Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in the United States; one in every three deaths is from heart disease and stroke, equal to 2,200 deaths per day. However, we can fight back against heart disease and stroke.

For people with diabetes, heart disease is a common and serious health condition. If you have diabetes, it’s important to understand your heart disease risk and what you can do to lower it.

Over the years, high blood sugar can slowly cause damage to blood vessels throughout the entire body. This is especially true in the vessel of the heart and brain. As a result, heart disease and stroke are two of the most important health risks for people with diabetes.

Statistics About Heart Disease and Diabetes

- Heart disease strikes people with diabetes almost twice as often as people who don’t have diabetes.
- People with diabetes tend to develop heart disease at a younger age than people without diabetes.
- Two out of three people with diabetes die from either heart disease or stroke.

Two Main Types of Heart Disease in People with Diabetes

1. Coronary artery disease (CAD): This refers to the slow narrowing of the arteries in the heart by fatty deposits, called plaques. If a cholesterol plaque suddenly ruptures, the resulting blockage in one of the heart's arteries causes a heart attack.

2. Congestive heart failure: This is a chronic condition in which the heart loses the ability to pump blood effectively. Shortness of breath with exertion and leg swelling are the main symptoms of heart failure.

Metabolic Syndrome

People with type 2 diabetes have high rates of cholesterol and triglyceride abnormalities, obesity, and high blood pressure, all of which are major contributors to higher rates of heart disease. Many people with diabetes have several of these conditions at the same time. This combination of problems is often called metabolic syndrome (formerly known as Syndrome X).

Risk Factors for Heart Disease and Diabetes

Even when glucose levels are under control having diabetes greatly increases the risk of heart disease and stroke. That’s because people with diabetes, particularly type 2 diabetes, often have the following conditions that contribute to their risk for developing cardiovascular disease.

- Obesity
- Abnormal Cholesterol Levels
- High Blood Pressure
- Poor Diet
- Uncontrolled Blood Sugars
- Lack of Physical Activity
- Smoking
- Having a Family Member with Heart Disease
Prevent Diabetes Related Heart Disease

To protect your heart and blood vessels, eat right, get physical activity, don’t smoke, and maintain healthy blood glucose, blood pressure, and cholesterol levels. Choose a healthy diet, low in salt. Work with a dietitian to plan healthy meals. If you’re overweight, talk about how to safely lose weight. Ask about a physical activity or exercise program. Quit smoking if you currently do. Get a hemoglobin A1C test at least twice a year to determine what your average blood glucose level was for the past 2 to 3 months. Get your blood pressure checked at every doctor’s visit, and get your cholesterol checked at least once a year. Take medications if prescribed by your doctor.

Fats

Most foods contain several different kinds of fat, and some are better for your health than others. You don’t need to completely eliminate all fat from your diet. In fact, some fats actually help promote good health. But it’s wise to choose the healthier types of fat, and then enjoy them in moderation.

Unsaturated fats, including monounsaturated fats and polyunsaturated fats, are healthy if eaten in small amounts. But saturated fats and trans fats can increase your risk of heart disease. Saturated fats should comprise of less than 7% of total calories from fat (or around 15 grams or less a day) and trans fat should be less than 1% of total calories (or less than 2 grams a day).

Saturated Fat & Trans Fat

Saturated fat is a type of fat that comes mainly from animal sources of food. Saturated fat raises total blood cholesterol levels and “bad” low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol levels, which can increase your risk of heart disease. Saturated fats should comprise of less than 7% of total calories from fat or around 15 grams or less a day.

Most trans fats are made during food processing through partial hydrogenation of unsaturated fats. This process creates fats that are easier to cook with and less likely to spoil than are naturally occurring oils. Trans fat can increase “bad” LDL cholesterol and lower “good” high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol. This can increase your risk of heart disease. Trans fat should be less than 1 you’re your total calories or less than 2 grams a day.

Most fats that have a high percentage of saturated fat or trans fat are solid at room temperature. Because of this, they’re typically referred to as solid fats. They include beef fat, pork fat, shortening, lard and butter. Trans fats can be found in many snacks and baked goods such as cakes, cookies, and icings.

Unsaturated Fats

Monounsaturated fat is a type of fat found in a variety of foods and oils. Eating foods rich in monounsaturated fats (MUFAs) can improve blood cholesterol levels, which may decrease your risk of heart disease.

Polyunsaturated fat is a type of fat found mostly in plant-based foods and oils. Eating foods rich in polyunsaturated fats (PUFAs) can improve blood cholesterol levels, which can decrease your risk of heart disease. One type of polyunsaturated fat, omega-3 fatty acids found in fish, may be especially beneficial to your heart. Omega-3s appear to decrease the risk of heart disease.

Foods made up mostly of monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats are liquid at room temperature, such as olive oil, safflower oil, peanut oil and corn oil.

Speak with Your Doctor and Dietitian

Individuals with diabetes and one or more risk factors are more likely to fall victim to heart disease or stroke. However, by controlling the risk factors, diabetes patients may avoid or delay the development of heart disease. Your doctor will periodically test for risk factors and your dietitian can help you improve your quality of life and decrease your risk for heart disease.
**Salmon with Tomato Basil Salsa**

*The fresh tomato-basil salsa will have you “hooked” on this delicious salmon dish. Rich in omega-3 fats, salmon is good for your heart as well as your taste buds*

Serves: 4, 3 ounces salmon and ¼ cup salsa per serving  
Prep Time: 5 minutes  
Baking Time: 15-20 minutes

### Salmon
4 salmon fillets (about 4 ounces each), rinsed and patted dry  
3 tablespoons light mayonnaise  
2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil  
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder  
1/2 teaspoon paprika

### Salsa
6 ounces grape tomatoes  
1/4 cup fresh basil  
1 to 1 1/4 ounces sweet onion  
1 tablespoon red wine vinegar

### Cooking Instructions
1. Lightly spray a shallow baking pan with cooking spray. Place the fish in the pan.  
2. In a small bowl, stir together the remaining salmon ingredients. Lightly spread on each fillet.  
3. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes, or until the fish flakes easily when tested with a fork.  
4. Meanwhile, chop the tomatoes, basil, and onion. Put in a small bowl. Add the vinegar, stirring gently to combine. Spoon over or beside the cooked fish.

### Nutritional Analysis

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### Other Helpful Websites:
- **American Diabetes Association**  
  [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org)  
- **American Heart Association**  
  [www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)  
- **American Dietetic Association**  
  [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)

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