



CONNECT THE DOTS



Diabetes and Your Heart—
How Medicare Helps



NCOA
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ON AGING

This booklet is part of NCOA's campaign, *Connect the Dots: Diabetes and Your Heart—How Medicare Helps*. The campaign helps seniors, care-givers, and the professionals who care for them understand the risk factors for—and links between—diabetes and high blood pressure. And, how Medicare benefits can help you learn about and pay for prevention and screening.

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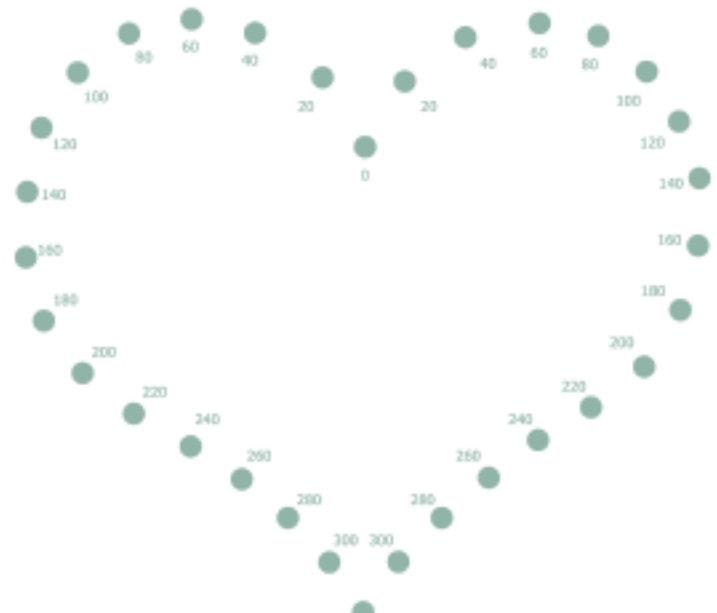


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Take advantage of educational programs about your health at senior centers or other places in your community.



Connect the Dots:

Diabetes and Your Heart—How Medicare Helps

The choices you make can go a long way toward keeping your heart healthy. This is especially true with diabetes and high blood pressure—two “silent” diseases that can cause heart attack and stroke.

Diabetes and high blood pressure (hypertension) are two of the fastest growing diseases in older adults. But that’s not all they have in common:

- Adults with diabetes are **two** to **four** times more likely to have hypertension.
- Men with diabetes are **three** times more likely to have high blood pressure.
- When people have diabetes and high blood pressure, their risk for heart disease **doubles**.

By connecting the dots between your lifestyle choices and these conditions, you can prevent or delay heart disease. The first step is to talk to your doctor about whether you are at risk by suggesting that you get screened for these conditions.

Medicare can help cover the costs of screening, diagnosis, and treatment. Now is the time to get informed and take charge of your health!



Talking to your doctor about your blood pressure or your risks for diabetes is a way to prevent or delaying these diseases.

Connect the Dots Checklist

Am I at Risk?

Diabetes and hypertension have many of the same risk factors. Please check any that you have. Then visit your doctor and bring this checklist along.

- Overweight
- High blood glucose (blood sugar)
- High cholesterol
- Many high blood pressure readings
- Smoker
- Get less than 30 minutes of physical activity per day
- Age 65 or older
- Parent, brother, or sister with diabetes or heart disease
- Waist size larger than 35 inches for women and 40 inches for men

A member of one or more of these ethnic groups:

- African American
- Latino
- Native American
- Asian American
- Pacific Islander

About Diabetes

What is diabetes?

Diabetes means that your blood glucose (blood sugar) is too high. It is a **serious** disease that can lead to heart attack, stroke, blindness, nerve damage, kidney problems and gum disease.

There are several types of diabetes:

- **Type 1 diabetes** occurs when the body does not make insulin. Insulin helps the body use glucose from food for energy. People with type 1 need to take insulin every day.
- **Type 2 diabetes** occurs when the body does not make or use insulin well. People with type 2 often need to take pills or insulin. Type 2 is the most common form of diabetes.
- **Pre-diabetes** is a condition in which blood glucose levels are higher than normal but not high enough for a diagnosis of diabetes. People with pre-diabetes can prevent or delay the onset of type 2 diabetes with modest weight loss by eating smaller amounts of healthy foods and getting regular exercise. About 54 million people in the United States have pre-diabetes.

Who's at risk?

Nearly 21 million people in the United States have diabetes, including 21 percent of people over age 60. Your risk for type 2 diabetes goes up as you get older, gain weight, or stop being active. It is more common in certain ethnic groups. Other risk factors include high blood pressure, family history, and gestational diabetes.

What are the signs?

Most people with type 2 diabetes do not notice any signs. In fact, about a third of cases are undiagnosed. However, if you have any of these symptoms, contact your health care team right away:

- Feel extremely tired
- Extreme hunger even after eating
- Have blurry vision
- Are very thirsty
- Urinate a lot
- Are losing weight without trying
- Have sores that don't heal
- Have frequent urinary tract infections
- Have numbness or tingling in your hands or feet

How can I find out if I have diabetes?

Diabetes is diagnosed by a simple blood test you can request from your doctor.



Portion control is very crucial to those with diabetes.

About Hypertension

(High Blood Pressure)

What is hypertension?

Hypertension means that your blood pressure is too high. Over time, untreated high blood pressure can damage organs such as the heart, kidneys, or eyes. This can lead to:

- Chest pain (angina), heart attack, or heart failure
- Stroke
- Kidney (renal) failure
- Peripheral arterial disease
- Eye damage
- Abnormal heartbeat

Who's at risk?

High blood pressure is a problem for one in three U.S. adults. People 55 and over have a 90 percent risk of developing it. Up to 65 percent of people with diabetes also have hypertension.

What are the signs?

Nearly a third of people do not know they have hypertension. Ensure that you have a blood pressure screening at least once every two years. Your doctor may recommend more frequent readings if you have pre-hypertension, high blood pressure or other risk factors for cardiovascular disease.

How can I find out if I have hypertension?

Blood pressure should be based on the average of two properly measured readings. The following chart will help you understand what your blood pressure numbers mean:

<i>Category</i>	<i>Systolic (top number)</i>	<i>Diastolic (bottom number)</i>
Normal	Less than 120	Less than 80
Pre-Hypertension	120–139	80–89
Hypertension	140–159	90–99



Checking your blood pressure frequently as you age is important.

What You Can Do

Diabetes and hypertension are serious diseases that can affect every part of your body—including your heart. The good news is there are steps you can take to prevent, delay, treat, and manage these conditions.

To connect the dots and take charge of your health follow the steps below. They will help you stay healthy and feel better.

- Become active for at least 30 minutes a day. Take advantage of exercise programs offered by your local senior center or other community organization.
- Make healthy food choices and reduce the amount you eat.
- Eat healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables, fish, lean meats, chicken or turkey without the skin, dry peas or beans, whole grains, and low-fat or skim milk and cheese.
- Keep fish and lean meat and poultry portions to about 3 ounces (or the size of a deck of cards). Bake, broil, or grill it.
- Eat foods that have less fat and salt.
- Eat foods with more fiber such as whole-grain cereals, breads, crackers, rice, or pasta.
- Take medication, if prescribed.
- Monitor your blood sugar (glucose) levels and blood pressure.
- Quit smoking.
- If available in your community or at your senior center, take a course in how to best manage your chronic conditions.

Note that people with diabetes can cut their risk of heart disease between 33 and 50 percent by keeping their blood pressure under control.

How Medicare Helps

Medicare can do more for you than simply help cover the costs of doctor and hospital bills. Some benefits can help you stay one step ahead of health problems.

Below are just a few examples of Medicare benefits that prevent health problems. Ask your doctor which tests and screenings are right for you and if you qualify for them:

- A Welcome to Medicare physical during the first six months you are on Medicare.
- Diabetes screenings for people with risk factors that include hypertension, high cholesterol, and/or pre-diabetes
- Eye exams and glaucoma tests every 12 months for people with diabetes
- Foot exams for people with diabetes-related nerve damage

Medicare Part B also covers:

- Diabetes self-management training
- Diabetes supplies
- Nutrition counseling
- Therapeutic shoes
- Counseling to quit smoking

Medicare Part D plans typically cover:

- Insulin
- Oral therapies for diabetes
- Hypertension medications

Visit www.Medicare.gov or call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) to learn more about coverage, benefits, and quality of care. TTY users should call 1-800-486-2048.

Where to Learn More

These groups can help you learn more about diabetes, hypertension, and heart health. Many offer information in both English and Spanish.

National Council on Aging

Connect the Dots Program
www.ncoa.org/connectthedots

National Diabetes Education Program

1-888-693-NDEP
www.YourDiabetesInfo.org

American Assn. of Diabetes Educators

1-800-TEAM-UP4 (800-832-6874)
www.diabeteseducator.org

American Diabetes Association

1-800-DIABETES (800-342-2383)
www.diabetes.org

American Dietetic Association

1-800-366-1655
www.eatright.org

American Heart Association

800-AHA-USA1 (800-242-8721)
www.americanheart.org

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

1-877-232-3422
www.cdc.gov/diabetes

National Alliance for Hispanic Health

1-866-783-2645
www.hispanichealth.org

National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse

1-800-860-8747
www.niddk.nih.gov

National Medical Association Diabetes Education Program

202-347-1895
www.NMAdiabetes.org

Medicare

To find out more about how your Medicare benefits work, call this toll-free number or visit the agency's Web site.

1-800-MEDICARE (800-633-4227)
www.Medicare.gov



Health fairs are often good places to get good information about maintaining your health.

NCOA would like to thank the American Diabetes Association, American Heart Association, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and National Diabetes Education Program for serving as resources for these materials.



The National Council on Aging's mission is to improve the lives of older Americans. Its programs help people to improve their health and reduce disability; find meaningful jobs and volunteer opportunities; access benefits programs; and enhance their ability to live in a community with dignity, choice and financial security. NCOA is a nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C. Founded in 1950, NCOA is a national organization with 3,700 members and a national network of more than 14,000 organizations and leaders. Our members include senior centers, area agencies on aging, adult day service centers, faith-based service organizations, senior housing facilities, employment services, consumer groups, and leaders from academia, business and labor.

