Keeping your heart and blood vessels healthy is important. Heart attacks and strokes are major causes of death when you have diabetes. A number of risk factors for heart disease have been identified. While there are some risk factors that you cannot manage, there are many that you can manage.

**Risk Factors You Can Manage**

**Smoking and tobacco products**
Take steps to stop using tobacco products. The nicotine, tar, and carbon monoxide in cigarettes and other tobacco products cause your blood vessels to constrict (narrow), which can raise your blood pressure and put stress on your heart. Talk with your doctor about quitting smoking.

**Weight**
Being overweight puts stress on your heart and blood vessels. Ask your health care provider for help with weight loss.

**Blood Pressure**
Keep track of your blood pressure. Less than 130/80 is the recommended level for people with diabetes. High blood pressure puts stress on your heart and blood vessels, and is a risk factor for heart disease and stroke.

**Diet**
Healthy eating habits will help keep your weight, cholesterol levels and blood pressure in the normal ranges. Eat plenty of fruits, vegetable, beans, whole grains, nuts and seeds. Choose lean protein like fish, poultry, low-fat yogurt, and skim milk. Include moderate amounts of healthy fats such as olive or canola oil, trans-fat free tub margarine, nuts, and seeds. Limit red meat, processed meats, processed foods, sugary drinks, sweets and butter. Avoid all trans-fats (partially hydrogenated oils). Use spices or Mrs. Dash rather than salt to flavor your foods.

**Blood sugars**
Maintaining your blood sugar in the target range on a daily basis is good for your heart. Check with your doctor for your blood sugar target range. The American Diabetes Association recommends 80-130 before meals and less than 180 two hours after a meal. Take your diabetes medications as directed. Keep track of your blood sugars by writing them down. Share a copy of your levels with your health care provider. Know your A1C level. The goal for a person with diabetes is 7% or less.
**Cholesterol**
Blood cholesterol that is too high can lead to narrowing of the vessels than could lead to heart attacks or strokes. Discuss your cholesterol results with your health care provider and know your cholesterol targets. Keep your total cholesterol below 200 and your LDL (bad cholesterol) below 100. Your doctor may have a lower target level for you. Keep your good cholesterol high: above 40 for males and above 50 for females.

**Activity**
People who are less active are more prone to have high blood pressure and obesity, which puts more stress on your heart and blood vessels. Be as physically active as you can. If you haven’t been active, talk with your doctor or health professional and start slowly. Aim for at least 30 minutes most days. Walking, gardening, doing yard work, swimming, or cleaning house will all work to meet this goal. Exercise is anything that increases your heart rate and causes you to break a light sweat.

**Alcohol**
Talk with your health care team about whether alcohol is safe for you. If you choose to drink alcohol, limit the amount and have it with food. Drinking too much alcohol can raise your blood pressure, which puts stress on your heart. Alcohol on an empty stomach can cause your blood sugar to go too low which can be dangerous for some heart conditions. Drinking too much alcohol adds extra calories which can lead to high blood sugar or weight gain.

**Dental Care**
Regular brushing (at least twice a day), flossing, and dental visits, are reported to help prevent heart disease.

**Stress**
Having a large amount of stress in your life can raise your blood pressure and your blood sugar, which puts more stress on your heart. When your stress is not well-managed you may find it more difficult to eat a healthy diet and stay active. Breathing, relaxation or gentle stretching exercises such as yoga can help you relax. Any steps that you take to manage the stress in your life can improve your overall health.

**Risk Factors You Cannot Manage**
A family history of high blood pressure, heart attack and/or heart disease, and diabetes are risk factors. As we grow older, we are more at risk for high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease. After menopause women are at more risk for heart related issues. African-Americans are at a higher risk for high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes.

Be aware of your risk factors. Try to change any behaviors that put you at risk. Do your best to keep track of your blood pressure readings, try to keep your blood sugar under control, and see your health care provider on a regular basis.