

National Diabetes Education Program

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National Diabetes Month 2014 Heart Health and Diabetes

National Diabetes Month is observed every November, when individuals, organizations and communities across the country shine a spotlight on diabetes. And this National Diabetes Month, the National Diabetes Education Program, or NDEP, and its partners are working to raise awareness about the link between diabetes and heart disease with the theme, “Be Smart About Your Heart: Control the ABCs of Diabetes.” Adults with diabetes are nearly two times more likely to die from heart disease or stroke than a person without diabetes. Therefore, it’s important and imperative that we bring a message of how one could lower the chances of developing a heart attack or a stroke by managing their diabetes with these ABCs.

The ABCs are mnemonic. The “A” is for the A1C level, or hemoglobin A1C. This is a blood test that measures your average blood sugar, or blood glucose level, over the past three months. It’s different from the blood sugar test itself that people do each day: It gives us an average value of how high, or how close to normal, or how good or poor control is. The “B” stands for blood pressure, and the “C” stands for cholesterol, and those three factors—the A1C level, the blood pressure and the cholesterol—are the three factors together that cause the blood vessel damage that leads to the complications such as heart disease, and kidney and eye disease and amputations. The “S” stands for stop smoking, which is not only a good idea if you have diabetes, but it’s just a good idea in general.

It’s very important to talk to your doctor about setting up goals for controlling your ABCs. Some of the questions that they should ask their doctor are, what is my blood sugar? What’s my blood pressure? What’s my cholesterol numbers? What should they be and how can I reach my goal?

I think developing an action plan also requires some weight management, in many cases, by eating healthy, regular physical exercise and taking medication as necessary. Making lifestyle changes can go a long way to prevent or to delay health problems associated with diabetes, such as heart disease and stroke. You really have the power to control this in your hands. The other aspect is that, really, in terms of these lifestyle changes, you don’t have to run marathons: Just walking 30 minutes a day, five days a week and changing—modifying—your weight, losing some weight—maybe 7 percent of your body weight—is sufficient to delay many of these complications. And therefore, small steps can lead to big rewards.

Your listeners can visit yourdiabetesinfo.org to learn more about the link between diabetes and heart disease and to pick up other very useful tips.