



Manage stress. Stress can raise your blood pressure and can also lead to unhealthy behaviours, such as drinking alcohol or overeating. If you are feeling stressed, seek support from family or friends, or call 1579 for professional advice. You may also wish to join the resilience programme offered by the Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate. Call **2326 6000** for more information.

For more information, please contact:
Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate
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healthpromotion.hdp.gov.mt



DIABETES AND HEART HEALTH

An information leaflet prepared
by the Health Promotion and Disease
Prevention Directorate



GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
MINISTRY FOR HEALTH
AND ACTIVE AGEING



Diabetes and heart health

Diabetes and heart disease often go together. Unfortunately, if you are suffering from diabetes, you are twice as likely to suffer from heart disease or stroke than someone who does not have diabetes. The good news is that you can lower your risk for heart disease and improve your heart health by altering your lifestyle.

What is heart disease?

Cardiovascular disease is a collective term for conditions that affect blood circulation in the body. The most common type is coronary artery disease, which affects blood flow to the heart due to the build-up of plaque in the blood vessels that supply oxygen and blood to the heart. This plaque is mostly made up of cholesterol deposits, which narrow the passage to the arteries, leading to a decreased blood flow and hardening of the arteries (atherosclerosis).

How does diabetes affect your heart?

Over time, uncontrolled blood sugar levels can damage blood vessels and nerves that regulate your heart. This occurs due to the body’s inability to use sugar properly, where more sugar sticks to your red blood cells and builds up in the blood. This accumulation can block and damage the vessels responsible for transporting blood, starving the heart of oxygen and nutrients. None of these conditions have symptoms. Thus, it is important to visit your medical doctor regularly.



Take Care of Your Heart

Follow a healthy diet. Eat more fresh fruits and vegetables, lean protein, and whole grain products like wholemeal bread, rice, and pasta. Eat fewer processed foods and choose healthy fats like avocado and olive oil. Drink more water, fewer sugary drinks, and less alcohol.

Aim for a healthy weight. Being overweight, especially around the waist, is a major risk factor for heart disease. Even a 10% weight loss reduces the risk of heart disease.

Get active. Being active helps control blood sugar levels and increases sensitivity to insulin. Aim for 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity physical activity, such as brisk walking. Check with your doctor before beginning a physical activity programme.

Manage your ABCs:

A:
Get a regular HbA1c test to monitor your average blood sugar levels.

B:
Keep your blood pressure under control.

C:
Manage your cholesterol levels.

S:
Quit smoking.