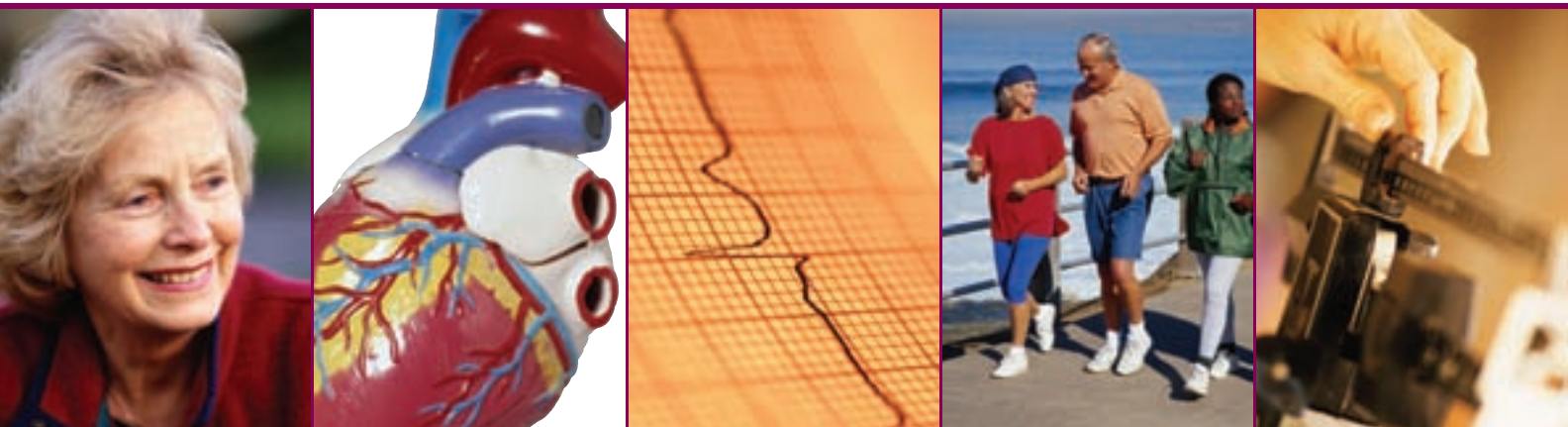


*Living with...*



# Chronic Conditions

• Cholesterol • High Blood Pressure • Heart Disease • Diabetes • Arthritis • Cancer • Asthma •



**NEBRASKA**

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**SELF-CARE ESSENTIALS**<sup>®</sup>  
A Simple Guide to Managing Your Health Care and Living Well

# Cholesterol

## About Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a soft, waxy substance found among the lipids (fats) in the bloodstream and in all of your body's cells. Although some cholesterol is an important part of a healthy body, a cholesterol level that's too high is a major risk factor for coronary heart disease, heart attack, and stroke.

There are two types of cholesterol—HDL (high-density lipoprotein) and LDL (low-density lipoprotein). These two combined equal your total cholesterol level. Triglycerides are also a factor to watch. Let's look at each in more detail.

**HDL (high-density lipoprotein).** This “good” cholesterol consists of high levels of protein that help protect against heart disease by carrying cholesterol away from the arteries. A level over 60 mg/dL is desirable (mg/dL stands for “milligrams per deciliter”—a measurement your healthcare provider will use).

**LDL (low-density lipoprotein).** LDL cholesterol is commonly referred to as “bad” cholesterol. We absorb bad cholesterol through fried, fatty foods. It has high levels of fat, but little protein, which makes it unstable, causing it to breakdown as it travels through the bloodstream. When LDL cholesterol breaks down, it is deposited on arterial walls, blocking blood flow to the heart. An LDL level below 100 mg/dL is desired and a level of 160 mg/dL or higher is considered high-risk.

**Total cholesterol.** Total cholesterol is the measure of both HDL and LDL combined. A total cholesterol level less than 200 mg/dL is desirable, and a level of 240 mg/dL or greater is considered high.

**Triglycerides.** Triglycerides are a form of fat. People with high levels of triglycerides often have high cholesterol and may be at high risk for coronary artery disease and stroke. Levels under 150 mg/dL are desired.

## Signs & Symptoms

### Symptoms

High cholesterol rarely causes symptoms. It is usually detected during a routine blood test performed by your healthcare provider. Cholesterol may first be discovered after a diagnosis of a condition caused in part by high cholesterol. These conditions may include stroke, coronary artery disease, etc.

### Risk Factors

There are several risk factors for high cholesterol. Some risk factors are within your control, and others are not.

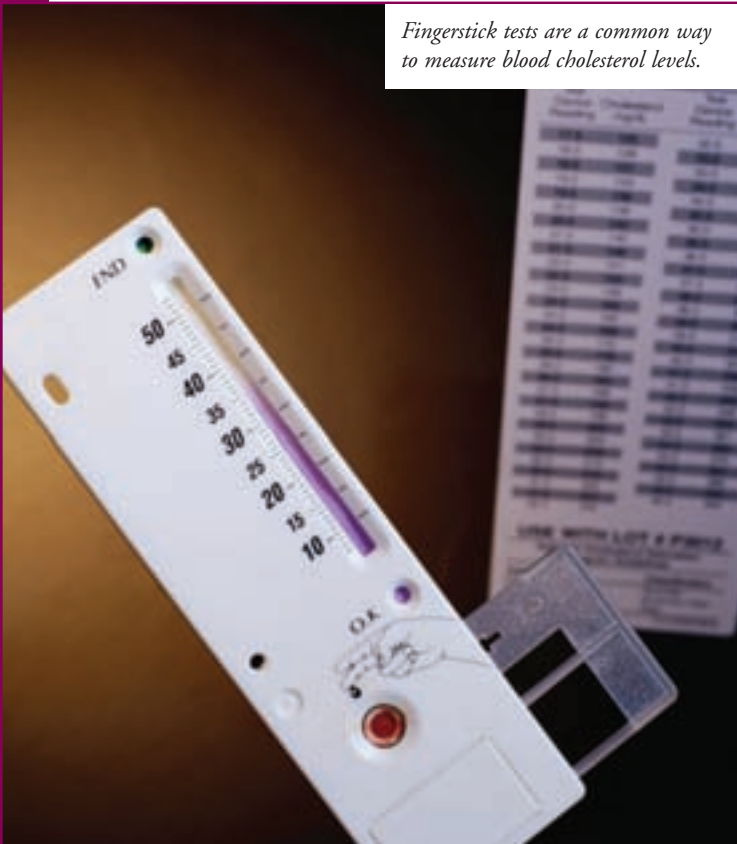
#### **Risk Factors You Can Control**

- ✓ Eating a high-fat, high-cholesterol diet
- ✓ Being overweight or obese
- ✓ Not exercising regularly
- ✓ Smoking

#### **Risk Factors You Cannot Control**

- ✓ Family History
- ✓ Age
- ✓ Gender

Fingerstick tests are a common way to measure blood cholesterol levels.



## A Self-Care Essential

**Get Screened.** Make a point of getting screened for high cholesterol regularly. If you're over the age of 20, you need to have your cholesterol checked every five years. High cholesterol can be managed—either with lifestyle modification, medication, or both—but you must know your cholesterol is high in order to address it effectively.

## When to Seek Care

When considering high cholesterol, there are a number of situations in which you should seek medical help. Seek medical help in the following situations.



If you're experiencing symptoms of a heart attack (*refer to the section entitled, **Heart Disease** for more information*) CALL 911!



If you're over 20 and have not been screened (you should be screened for cholesterol every five years after age 20)



If you think you may have diabetes (*refer to the section entitled, **Diabetes** for more information*)



If you have a family history of high cholesterol, coronary artery disease, or diabetes

## Managing Cholesterol

Home treatment for high cholesterol will include one of two strategies, and maybe both. These strategies include lifestyle modification and drug intervention.

### Lifestyle Modification



**Reduce weight**—Losing weight can help reduce LDL cholesterol and raise HDL cholesterol.



**Exercise**—Moderate physical activity for 30 minutes most days of the week may help lower bad cholesterol and raise good cholesterol. Check with your health-care provider before beginning an exercise program.



**Diet**—Diet changes may lower cholesterol as much as five to 20 percent.

## Blood Cholesterol Levels

### Total Cholesterol

#### Less than 200 mg/dL

Desirable level that puts you at lower risk for heart disease. A cholesterol level of 200 mg/dL or higher raises your risk.

#### 200 to 239 mg/dL

Borderline high

#### 240 mg/dL and above

High blood cholesterol. A person with this level has more than twice the risk of heart disease as someone whose cholesterol is below 200 mg/dL.

### HDL Cholesterol

#### Less than 40 mg/dL

Low HDL cholesterol. A major risk factor for heart disease.

#### 40 to 59 mg/dL

The higher your HDL level, the better.

#### 60 mg/dL and above

High HDL cholesterol. An HDL of 60 mg/dL and above is considered protective against heart disease.

### LDL Cholesterol

Less than 100 mg/dL

100 to 129 mg/dL

130 to 159 mg/dL

160 to 189 mg/dL

190 mg/dL or above

### Category

Optimal

Near/above optimal

Borderline high

High

Very high

### Triglyceride Level

Less than 150 mg/dL

150 to 199 mg/dL

200 to 499 mg/dL

500 mg/dL or above

### Category

Normal

Borderline high

High

Very high



**Quit smoking**—Studies have shown that HDL (good cholesterol) levels increase soon after quitting smoking.

### Drug Intervention

If your total cholesterol, especially your LDL level, remains high despite lifestyle modifications, your healthcare provider may recommend drug intervention. Generally, an LDL level over 190, or an LDL over 160 with two or more risk factors, requires medication.

*“A total cholesterol level of less than 200 mg/dL is desirable, and puts you at a lower risk for developing heart disease.”*

# High Blood Pressure

## About High Blood Pressure

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against the walls of the arteries. When a person experiences high blood pressure (hypertension), the heart is forced to work harder than normal, causing it to grow abnormally large—straining arteries and the heart itself. High blood pressure can also damage kidneys and other organs, as well as lead to atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) and stroke.

A blood pressure reading consists of two numbers—systolic and diastolic. Let's look at each of these measurements in more detail.

**Systolic**—The systolic measurement is the pressure of blood against artery walls when the heart pumps blood through the body. It is the first number in a blood pressure reading, and is considered normal when it is less than 120 mmHg (mmHg means “millimeters of mercury”—a measure your healthcare provider will use in relation to blood pressure).

**Diastolic**—The diastolic measurement is the pressure of blood against the artery walls when the heart relaxes and refills with blood. It is the second number in a blood pressure reading, and it is considered normal when it is less than 80 mmHg.

**Key Point:** A consistent reading of 120/80 mmHg or higher (the threshold of “prehypertension”) is cause for discussion with your healthcare provider. See the chart in this section for a detailed break down of blood pressure levels.

## Signs & Symptoms

### Symptoms

High blood pressure is often called the “silent killer” because it has no symptoms. Sadly, it is estimated that of the 50 million Americans age six and over who have high blood pressure, one-third are unaware that they have the condition.

### Risk Factors

Several risk factors—both controllable and uncontrollable—contribute to the likelihood of developing high blood pressure.

#### *Risk Factors You Can Control*

- ✓ Being overweight or obese
- ✓ Tobacco use
- ✓ Eating too much salt
- ✓ Consuming too much alcohol
- ✓ Living a sedentary lifestyle

#### *Risk Factors You Cannot Control*

- ✓ Race
- ✓ Age
- ✓ Family History



*“High blood pressure is often called the ‘silent killer’ because it has no symptoms.”*

## A Self-Care Essential

**Know Your Numbers.** High blood pressure is often referred to as the “silent killer” because it has no symptoms. As with cholesterol and many other chronic conditions, it’s important to get screened regularly. And, with the recent modification to blood pressure guidelines to include the category of “prehypertensive” it may be a good idea to get screened again soon. Many hospitals and community centers offer free screening services. Take advantage of these services and “know your numbers.”

## When to Seek Care

Call your healthcare provider immediately if you have high blood pressure and any of the following symptoms.



If you’re experiencing the symptoms of a heart attack (*refer to the section entitled, **Heart Disease** for more information*) CALL 911!



If your blood pressure rises suddenly above a controlled, normal range



If your blood pressure is 180/110 mmHg



If you experience a sudden, severe headache



If your blood pressure is higher than 140/90 mmHg on two or more separate occasions



If you experience uncomfortable side effects that you believe are caused by blood pressure medication

## Managing High Blood Pressure

Home treatment for high blood pressure will include one of two strategies, and maybe both. These strategies include lifestyle modification and drug intervention.

### Lifestyle Modification



**Reduce weight**—Losing weight reduces the strain on your heart and will cause blood pressure to drop as a result.



**Exercise**—Lack of regular physical activity (30 minutes of moderate activity most days of the week) increases your risk for heart attack or stroke.



**Reduce alcohol intake**—Limit your alcohol consumption to no more than one or two drinks per day.



**Quit smoking**—Smoking is a major risk factor for almost every serious disease including high blood pressure.



**Alter your diet**—Eating a diet that’s low in sodium may significantly reduce blood pressure.

### Drug Intervention

Doctors have different opinions as to when medication is necessary; however, individuals with multiple risk factors for heart disease and elevated blood pressure (greater than 120/80 mmHg) are often treated using blood pressure medication in addition to lifestyle modification.

*Source: American Heart Association*

## Blood Pressure Readings

Blood Pressure Classification	Systolic (mmHg)		Diastolic (mmHg)	Lifestyle Modification
Normal	less than 120	and	less than 80	Encourage
Prehypertension	120-139	or	80-89	Yes
Stage 1 Hypertension	140-159	or	90-99	Yes
Stage 2 Hypertension	160 or higher	or	100 or higher	Yes

*Source: American Heart Association Recommended Blood Pressure Levels*

# Heart Disease

## About Heart Disease

Your heart is a muscle that pumps blood to the organs and tissues in your body. This blood contains oxygen and nutrients to keep you alive, and it travels through a network of blood vessels that measures approximately 60,000 miles.

Although there are a number of conditions that can be classified as “heart disease,” in this section, we’ll concentrate on coronary artery disease—a heart condition in which fatty deposits clog and harden coronary arteries. This “hardening of the arteries” can typically occur in mid to late life, and blocks blood flow to your heart muscle. This blocked blood flow causes chest pain (angina) and, if the blood is blocked for a long enough period of time, a portion of the heart muscle can die. This is commonly known as a heart attack.

Because heart disease is the number one killer in the United States—and is also very preventable—it’s important to know the symptoms and risk factors of heart disease.

## Signs & Symptoms

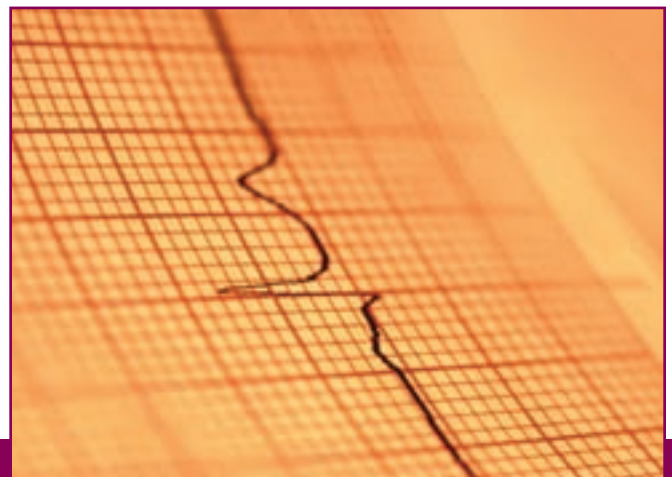
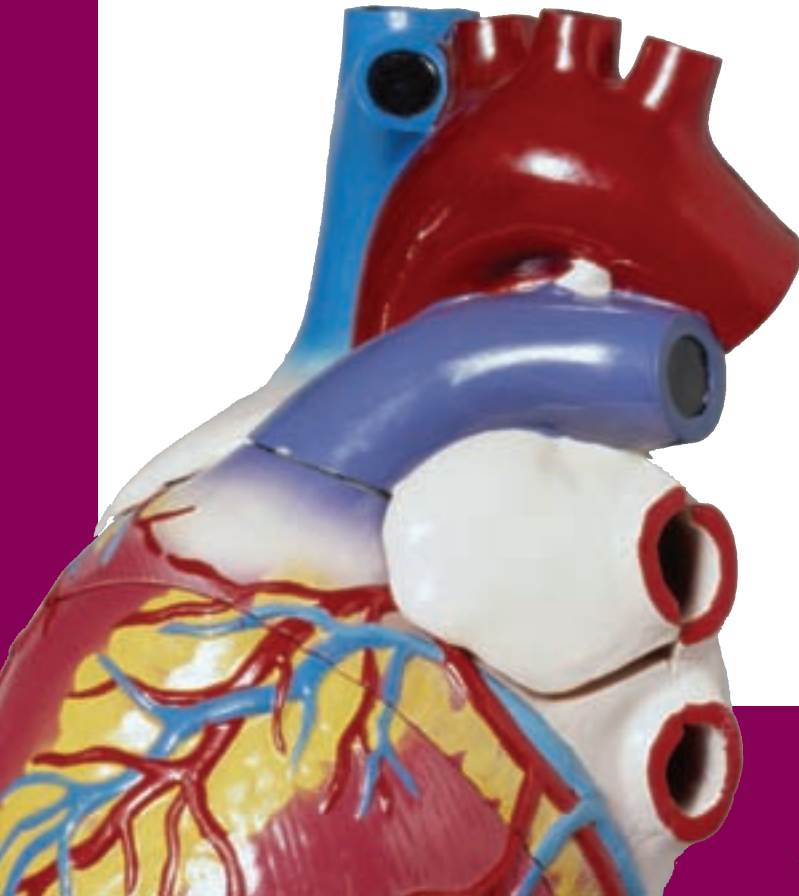
Because heart disease tends to develop over a long period of time, symptoms can be vague, and may vary from person to person. Regardless, here are some tell-tale signs that your heart may not be working correctly.

### Symptoms

- ✓ Shortness of breath
- ✓ Pain in the chest (especially during exercise or hard work)
- ✓ Swelling in the legs
- ✓ Extreme fatigue

### Risk Factors

- ✓ Family history of heart disease
- ✓ Poor nutrition
- ✓ Excessive stress
- ✓ Smoking
- ✓ Leading a sedentary lifestyle (lack of exercise)
- ✓ Being male
- ✓ Being overweight or obese
- ✓ Having high blood pressure, diabetes, or high cholesterol



## A Self-Care Essential

**Women and Heart Disease.** Heart disease is not just a man's disease! In fact, heart disease is actually the leading cause of death among American women today. 267,000 women die each year from heart attacks (six times more than the number that die from breast cancer). The good news is that by working with your healthcare provider to get regular screenings and checkups, you can address your risk factors before it's too late. Schedule an appointment today.



## When to Seek Care

The symptoms of heart disease should clue you in that your heart is not functioning properly. If you are experiencing any of the symptoms of heart disease outlined in this section, you should contact your healthcare provider who can screen you for the presence of heart disease and help you implement an action plan.

Heart disease in advanced stages can lead to a heart attack, meaning that blood flow to a coronary artery is blocked for a significant amount of time (approximately 30 minutes to two hours). If this happens, you'll experience what is commonly known as a heart attack. A heart attack is a life-threatening event. Call 911 immediately if you're experiencing any of the following symptoms.

### Symptoms of a Heart Attack



If there is burning, crushing, and/or squeezing pain or pressure in the chest



If there is pain in the arms, neck, back, and/or jaw



If pain doesn't go away or lasts longer than 15 minutes



If you experience an irregular pulse or heartbeat



If you experience nausea, vomiting, shortness of breath, dizziness, weakness, or sweating

## Managing Heart Disease

Heart disease is a serious condition that requires the attention of a healthcare provider. You and your healthcare provider can establish a plan of action for managing your condition most effectively. Make sure to include the following steps in your action plan.



**Take prescribed medications as directed.**

Medications can be an important part of managing heart disease.



**Quit smoking.** Quitting smoking may be the best decision to improve your health—period.



**Exercise regularly.** Check with your healthcare provider before beginning an exercise program.



**Eat a diet low in cholesterol.** Eat more pasta, whole grains, etc.



**Control high blood pressure.** High blood pressure can be controlled through medication or lifestyle changes.



**Reduce stress.** Try meditation, deep breathing, guided imagery, etc.



**Lose weight.** Eating sensibly can help you maintain a proper weight.



**Speak with your healthcare provider about aspirin use.** According to the American Heart Association, aspirin helps prevent the recurrence of heart attacks.

*“The network of blood vessels and arteries in the human body measures approximately 60,000 miles.”*

# Diabetes

## About Diabetes

Diabetes is a serious disease. If not diagnosed and treated early, it can result in blindness, heart attack, stroke, kidney failure, birth defects, and limb loss. What's more, diabetes kills approximately 200,000 people each year.

Startlingly, you may not know you have it. Onset is often gradual and difficult to identify—you can have diabetes without any symptoms. In fact, half of those affected don't even know they have the disease until they seek help for one of its complications. Diabetes is a growing disease—800,000 new cases of diabetes are diagnosed each year—a number that is expected to rise as baby boomers age.

There are two main types of diabetes—type 1 and type 2. Both are caused by the body's inability to produce or properly use insulin—a hormone that maintains the proper level of sugar in your blood.

**Type 1 Diabetes:** Type 1 diabetes is often diagnosed in children and young adults, and may have a sudden and severe onset, requiring emergency medical care. The body's immune system attacks and destroys the ability of the pancreas to make insulin, so people with type 1 diabetes must eat a special diet, get regular exercise, check their blood sugar levels, and give themselves shots of insulin several times throughout the day.

**Type 2 Diabetes:** Ninety to 95 percent of people with diabetes have type 2. It is usually diagnosed in older adults, although overweight children sometimes develop it as well. It is caused by the pancreas not making enough insulin, or the body not using it well. People can have type 2 diabetes for years without symptoms, yet it is still damaging to their bodies.

## Signs & Symptoms

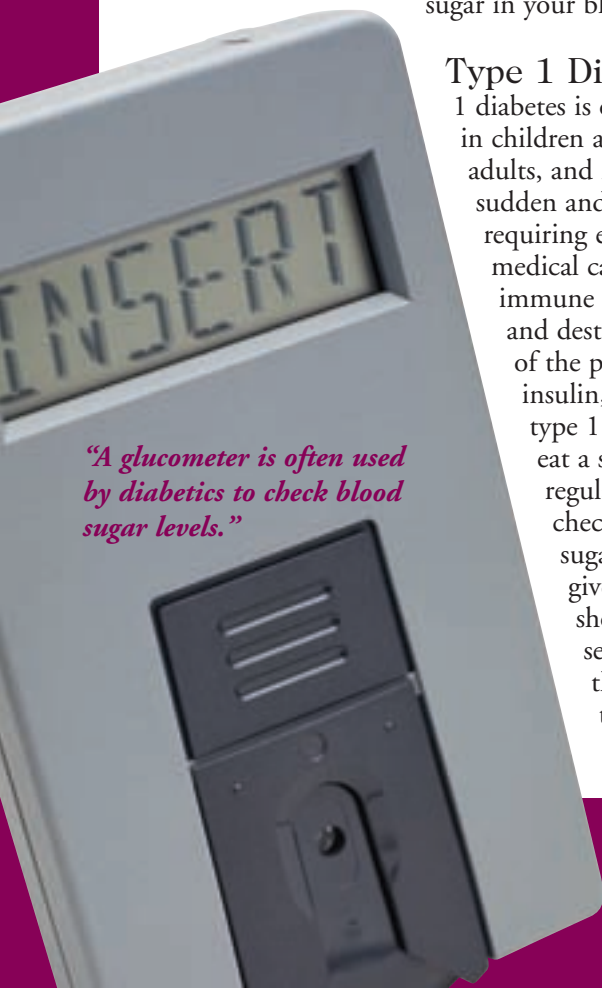
The symptoms of diabetes may be hard to recognize, and are sometimes mistaken for signs of aging. The risk factors for diabetes, however, are straightforward.

### Symptoms:

- ✓ Increased thirst
- ✓ Extreme hunger
- ✓ Frequent urination
- ✓ Unexplained weight loss
- ✓ Fatigue, dizziness, and weakness
- ✓ Trouble seeing or blurred vision
- ✓ Sores that heal slowly
- ✓ Recurring infections of the skin, bladder, and vagina

### Risk Factors:

- ✓ Being 45 years of age or older
- ✓ A family history of diabetes
- ✓ Being overweight or obese
- ✓ Having high blood pressure—140/90 mmHg or higher
- ✓ Leading a sedentary lifestyle
- ✓ Being a Native American, African American, Asian American, or Pacific Islander
- ✓ Having a baby weighing more than nine pounds at birth



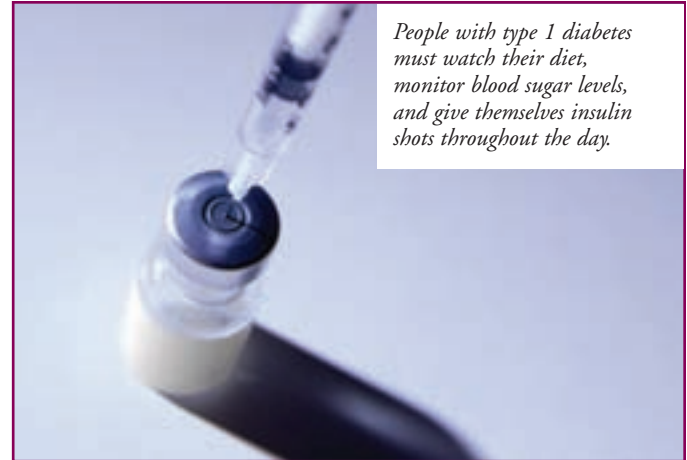
*“A glucometer is often used by diabetics to check blood sugar levels.”*

*“800,000 new cases of diabetes are diagnosed each year—a number that is expected to rise as baby boomers age.”*



## A Self-Care Essential

**Weighty Matters.** According to the American Diabetes Association, nearly 90 percent of all people with newly diagnosed type 2 diabetes are overweight. And with about 60 percent of Americans now overweight or obese, it's no surprise that 800,000 new cases of diabetes are reported each year. But remember, it is possible to lose weight and keep it off. Talk with your healthcare provider to develop a strategy that's right for you.



*People with type 1 diabetes must watch their diet, monitor blood sugar levels, and give themselves insulin shots throughout the day.*

## When to Seek Care

Diabetes is a serious condition that requires the regular attention of a healthcare provider. With that in mind, seek immediate emergency care in the following situations.



If a known diabetic is unconscious



If you or a loved one is exhibiting the classic signs of diabetes (increased thirst, extreme hunger, frequent urination, etc.)



If blood sugar drops and cannot be restored within fifteen minutes after ingesting a sugary substance



If a diabetic is unable to eat or is vomiting



If a known diabetic suspects she is pregnant

## Managing Diabetes

There is no cure for diabetes yet, but there is much you can do to manage the disease. Include the following in your diabetes management plan.



**Monitor blood sugar levels.**



**Take insulin and other medications as directed.**



**Manage your weight.**



**Eat small, regular meals that include lots of fiber** (fruits, vegetables, and whole grains).



**Exercise regularly** (moderate exercise for 30 minutes most days of the week—check with your healthcare provider before beginning an exercise program).



**Communicate regularly with your healthcare professional.**



**Have your eyes and feet checked by a healthcare provider every year** and closely monitor blood pressure and cholesterol levels.



**Be cautious if drinking alcohol** (check blood sugar levels as needed, and make sure to eat either before or while you drink).



# Arthritis

## About Arthritis

Arthritis is a chronic condition that can cause a great deal of pain and severely limit an individual's activities. Arthritis is much more common in older adults, but the perception that the disease is a condition that only affects older adults is off base. In fact, most people with arthritis are younger than 65, and nearly 300,000 children are affected by arthritis as well.

Arthritis is a disease of the joints, and causes the membranes, cartilage, and tissues around the joints to become inflamed. After prolonged inflammation and breakdown, joints can become severely damaged, causing permanent disability.

At this time, the cause of arthritis is not known; although researchers are investigating the possibility that a virus may cause the body's immune system to attack the joints. There is no cure for arthritis; however, it can be effectively managed using self-care techniques.

## Signs & Symptoms

There are more than 100 different types of arthritis. Osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, and gout are the most common forms. Osteoarthritis causes cartilage to break down resulting in bones rubbing together. Rheumatoid arthritis causes the tissues lining the joints to become inflamed leading to disability. Gout is a disease caused by the deposit of uric acid crystals in the joints. The symptoms of these three common forms of arthritis include the following.

### Symptoms

- ✓ Pain or stiffness of joints (especially in the knees, fingers, hips, and feet)
- ✓ Swelling of joints
- ✓ Sudden and strong pain
- ✓ General stiffness in the mornings, or after prolonged rest
- ✓ Redness or heat surrounding a joint

### Risk Factors

- ✓ A possible genetic predisposition to arthritis
- ✓ Being female
- ✓ Being between the ages of 50 and 70
- ✓ Having experienced an injury to a joint
- ✓ Long-term wear and tear on joints



## A Self-Care Essential

**What About Arthritis-Specific Diets?** While there are several “arthritis-specific” diets that claim to reduce arthritis symptoms—or even cure the condition—the Arthritis Foundation recommends arthritis sufferers evaluate unproven diets very carefully. Arthritis-specific diets known to have harmful side effects are those that rely on heavy doses of alfalfa, copper salts or zinc, or the so-called immune power diet or the low-calorie/low-fat/low-protein diet. The Arthritis Foundation recommends a sensible diet that includes variety, balance, and moderation to help arthritis sufferers maintain a healthy weight and potentially reduce symptoms.



## When to Seek Care

Because arthritis can be a serious chronic condition, it's important that you involve your healthcare provider in the decision making process. You'll especially want to call your healthcare provider if you exhibit any of the following symptoms.



If pain and swelling in and surrounding the joints comes on suddenly with no explanation



If joint pain is associated with fever or rash



If the joint is so inflamed and painful that it's impossible to use



If your pain does not improve after six weeks of self-care

## Managing Arthritis

There are many steps you can take to treat arthritis in the comfort of your own home. Here's a list of some helpful self-care strategies.



**Use ice**—Apply ice or cold packs to reduce pain and swelling.



**Get rest**—Get plenty of rest and talk with your healthcare provider about the best sleeping position for you.



**Take your meds**—Take any medications prescribed by your doctor according to directions. Be careful of drug interactions.



**Use self-care**—Take over-the-counter medications such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen to relieve pain. Be careful of drug interactions.



**Warm up**—Take a warm shower or bath to loosen and relax stiff, swollen joints. Heat is often very helpful in relaxing and soothing sore muscles and joints.



**Keep moving**—Keep active to prevent joints from becoming stiff. Often, prolonged rest can further irritate arthritis. You should be able to move without significant pain.



**Try low-impact exercises**—When exercising, try low-impact exercises like swimming that won't irritate your arthritis. Check with your healthcare provider before beginning an exercise program.



**Keep stretching**—Stretch your joints and muscles daily, taking them through their full range of motion. This will help to keep your joints and muscles more limber.



**Learn more**—Educate yourself and others about your condition. Try visiting the Arthritis Foundation at [www.arthritis.org](http://www.arthritis.org).



**Stay positive**—Stay positive about your condition. Even though there's currently not a cure, there are many ways to manage arthritis.

*“Nearly 70 million Americans have arthritis or chronic joint symptoms. As the population ages, this number will probably increase dramatically.”*

# Cancer

## About Cancer

Cancer is caused when cells in a part of the body begin to grow out of control. Although there are many types of cancer, they all start because of the out-of-control growth of abnormal cells.

In healthy adults, normal cells only divide and multiply to replace dead or injured cells. Abnormal cells are different from normal cells because they continue to grow and divide. This out-of-control growth can lead to the formation of masses (tumors)—which may or may not be cancerous.

## Signs & Symptoms

Because cancer can take many forms, and affect many parts of the body, the signs and symptoms of cancer are numerous. Often times, the signs and symptoms of cancer depend on the type and location of the cancer. Additionally, because the general signs and symptoms of cancer may often mimic the symptoms of other conditions, it's important to follow regular cancer screening schedules—see the chart on the following page. Listed here are some of the general, as well as specific signs and symptoms of cancer.



### *General Signs and Symptoms of Cancer*

- ✓ Unexplained weight loss
- ✓ Fatigue
- ✓ Pain
- ✓ Fever
- ✓ Skin changes

### *Specific Signs and Symptoms of Cancer*

- ✓ Changes in bowel habits or bladder function (colon, bladder, or prostate cancer)
- ✓ Sores that do not heal or recent changes in a wart or mole (skin cancer)
- ✓ Unusual bleeding or discharge (lung, cervical, bladder, or kidney cancer)
- ✓ Thickening or a lump in the breast, testicle, or other part of the body (breast or testicular cancer)
- ✓ Indigestion, difficulty swallowing, nagging cough, or hoarseness (stomach, esophagus, or throat cancer)

*If you're experiencing any of the above signs and symptoms of cancer, it's important to see your healthcare provider right away. Early detection is one of the most important variables in successful cancer treatment.*

### *Risk Factors for Cancer*

There are a number of risk factors for developing cancer. Some of these risk factors are within your control, and others are not.

#### *Risk Factors You Can Control*

- ✓ Smoking and tobacco use
- ✓ Being overweight or obese
- ✓ Not exercising regularly
- ✓ Sun exposure
- ✓ Radon exposure

#### *Risk Factors You Cannot Control*

- ✓ Family history
- ✓ Age
- ✓ Gender

*“Some forms of cancer are thought to be hereditary, making family health history an important risk factor.”*

## A Self-Care Essential

**It's Never Too Late to Quit Smoking.** No matter what your age or how long you've smoked, quitting will help you live longer. Statistics prove that smokers are twice as likely to die from heart attacks as are non-smokers. But quitting smoking now greatly reduces your chances of developing serious health problems. According to the American Lung Association, people who quit smoking before the age of 35 avoid 90 percent of the health risks attributable to tobacco use. Those who quit smoking before age 50 have one-half the risk of dying in the next 15 years compared with continuing smokers. Kick the habit!

## When to Seek Care

If you're experiencing any of the signs and symptoms of cancer listed in this section, it's important to see your healthcare provider right away. Moreover, because early detection is one of the most important variables in successful cancer treatment, it's important to follow the cancer screening guidelines outlined in this section.

## Managing Cancer

Cancer is a serious health condition and treatment will be a decision made between you and your healthcare team. Whatever course of treatment you choose, there are some things you can do to help better manage cancer throughout the treatment process and beyond.

### Respond Appropriately to Your Diagnosis

Learning as much as you can about your condition, communicating openly with loved ones, keeping a positive attitude, and learning about your insurance coverage can go a long way toward helping you cope with a cancer diagnosis.

### Watch Your Nutrition

Cancer often disrupts the body's ability to absorb important nutrients, and can also lessen one's appetite. Therefore, it's important to make a registered dietician a part of your healthcare team.

### Control Pain

Here's encouraging news—more than half of all cancer patients do not experience significant pain. If pain exists, it can almost always be managed. Over-the-counter pain

## Cancer Screening Guidelines

The American Cancer Society recommends that all adults get these regular cancer screening tests, so that cancer can be discovered and treated early. People with increased risk for cancer may need more frequent and additional tests.

Test	Gender	Age	Frequency
Doctor exam for cancer	Men/Women	20 to 39	Every 3 years
		40 and over	Each year
Breast self-exam	Women	20 and over	Monthly
Digital rectal exam	Men	50 and over	Each year
Mammogram	Women	40 and over	Each year
Pelvic exam and Pap smear	Women	21 and older or three years after beginning vaginal intercourse	Each year
Doctor breast exam	Women	20 to 39	Every 3 years
		40 and older	Each year
Prostate-specific antigen	Men	50 and older	Each year
Sigmoidoscopy	Men/Women	over 50	Every 3-5 years
Fecal occult blood test	Men/Women	over 50	Each year

**NOTE:** After three or more consecutive satisfactory examinations with normal findings, the Pap test may be performed less frequently at the doctor's discretion.

relievers can be very effective, and narcotics and tranquilizers exist for severe pain. Talk with your healthcare provider about the right pain management strategy for you.

Source: American Cancer Society



# Asthma

## About Asthma

Asthma is a chronic disease that affects a person's airways—the tubes that carry air in and out of the lungs. Asthma causes the inside walls of the airways to become inflamed. This inflammation makes the airways very sensitive, and they tend to react strongly to “triggers”—things to which you are allergic or find irritating.

When these airways react, they get narrower and less air flows to the lungs. This causes symptoms like wheezing (a whistling sound when you breathe), coughing, chest tightness, and trouble breathing.

## Signs & Symptoms

*Common asthma symptoms include:*

- ✓ Coughing
- ✓ Chest tightness
- ✓ Faster or noisy breathing
- ✓ Wheezing
- ✓ Shortness of breath

*People with asthma may have:*

- ✓ Symptoms brought on by exercises such as running, biking, or other brisk activity, especially during cold weather
- ✓ Coughing or wheezing brought on by prolonged crying or laughing
- ✓ Coughing or wheezing when near an allergen or irritant like tobacco smoke, pet dander, dust, or pollen

## Risk Factors

Although there are a number of “triggers”—like tobacco smoke, pet dander, dust, or pollen—which may further irritate a person's asthma, or even incite an asthma attack, risk factors for asthma are largely beyond our control. Risk factors include the following.

- ✓ **Age**—Although asthma affects people of all ages, it often starts in childhood and is more common in children than adults.
- ✓ **Allergies**—Asthma is closely linked to allergies. In fact, most people with asthma have allergies.
- ✓ **Gender**—More boys have asthma than girls, but in adulthood, more women have asthma than men.
- ✓ **Family history**—Individuals who inherit a tendency toward overreactive bronchial tubes may be more likely to develop asthma.
- ✓ **Race**—Although asthma is a problem among all races, African Americans have more asthma attacks and are more likely than whites to be hospitalized for asthma attacks and to die from asthma.



*“Asthma ‘triggers’ include things like tobacco smoke, pet dander, dust, and pollen.”*


## A Self-Care Essential


**Stress and Asthma.** According to the American Academy of Allergies, Asthma, and Immunology, stress can lower your immune system's ability to manage chronic conditions such as asthma. People with asthma may be more likely to get sick if under a high degree of stress.


If you're an asthma sufferer, try implementing the following stress management strategies to strengthen your body's ability to manage your asthma better.


- Avoid stressful situations
- Practice relaxation techniques
- Get plenty of exercise
- Eat well
- Get plenty of sleep
- Develop a strong, social support network


involves using a peak-flow meter to gauge how well you're breathing, and to determine the best course of treatment for individual asthma incidents.

 **Become familiar with the substances that “trigger” your asthma, and avoid them.** Often these “triggers” include tobacco smoke, pet dander, dust, or pollen.

 **Drink extra fluids to help thin and clear mucus** from the bronchial tubes.

 **Learn to use your medication correctly.** Ask your doctor about using an inhaler—a device used to deliver metered doses of medicine to the lungs.


 **Consider keeping a diary to record details about your asthma attacks** so you can better avoid them in the future.

 **Communicate regularly with your healthcare provider** about your condition.

## When to Seek Care


Most of the time, asthma can easily be managed in the comfort of your own home. There are, however, times when your asthma may need immediate medical attention. Call 911 immediately in the following situations.

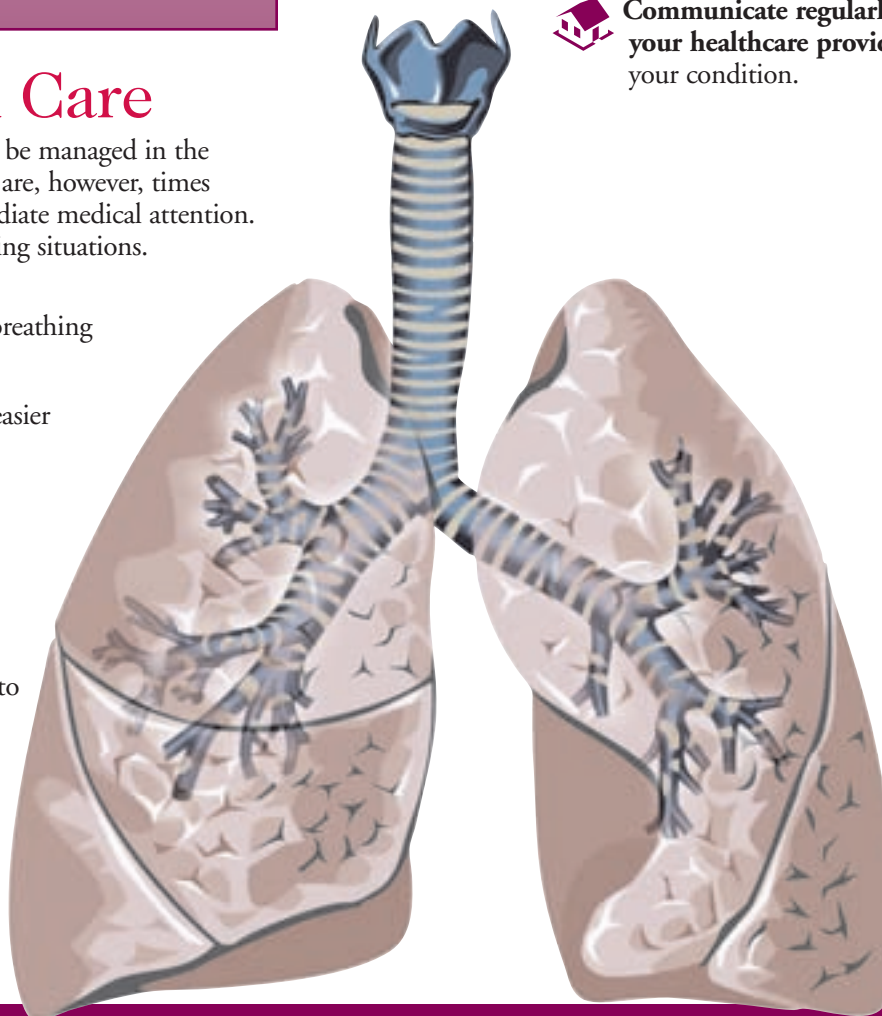
 If you have severe difficulty breathing

 If breathing doesn't become easier 20 minutes after taking your medication

## Managing Asthma

If you have asthma, it is important to learn how to take care of yourself. The following tips and strategies will prove helpful if you or a loved one is dealing with asthma.

 **Develop an “asthma action plan”** with your healthcare provider. This



*“See a doctor if you have severe difficulty breathing or if breathing doesn't become easier 20 minutes after taking your medication.”*

*Do you know  
how to care for...*

# Chronic Conditions?

- Cholesterol
- High Blood Pressure
- Heart Disease
- Diabetes
- Arthritis
- Cancer
- Asthma

## Take The Self-Care Quiz

The quiz below is designed to test your knowledge on the information presented in this section. Use this quiz as a tool to better understand how to care for yourself and others.

True    False

1. LDL cholesterol is known as “good” cholesterol because it protects against heart disease.
2. High blood pressure has many symptoms.
3. Heart disease is the number one killer in the United States.
4. Those with diabetes should take special care of their eyes and feet.
5. Family health history is a risk factor for some types of cancer.

*Answers can be found inside this section.*



## SELF-CARE ESSENTIALS®

A Simple Guide to Managing Your Health Care and Living Well

*Important information on Chronic Conditions*

### Managing Your Own Health and Seeking Medical Care

The information contained in this guide is based on the best health information available and has been reviewed for accuracy. This information is not intended to replace the advice of your healthcare provider. If you have any questions about managing your own health and/or seeking medical care, please contact a medical professional.



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