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Diabetes and High Blood Pressure: Are You at Risk for Both?

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Diabetes and high blood pressure put your health at serious risk. Each of these diseases can damage your heart and blood vessels. So when you have both, it's double trouble. In fact, when people have both high blood pressure and diabetes, their risk of heart and blood vessel disease doubles.

Hypertension (the medical name for high blood pressure) and diabetes often accompany one another. The American Diabetes Association reports that almost 2 out of 3 adults with diabetes also have high blood pressure.

Diabetes can predispose people to high blood pressure. Studies show a connection between hypertension and insulin resistance, a factor in diabetes. Insulin is the hormone your body makes to convert the sugar you eat into energy. Many people who develop diabetes are insulin resistant, which means they don't utilize their own insulin efficiently.

Everyone should be concerned, especially if they are middle-aged or older. But too often, people with hypertension and diabetes don't know they have these diseases. Mild diabetes can go undetected for years. High blood pressure is called the "silent killer" because it has no symptoms or warning signs.

That's why it's so important to see a doctor for a physical exam. Your doctor can test your blood sugar to detect diabetes, and he or she can measure your blood pressure.

If you have hypertension or diabetes, you will need regular medical checkups so your doctor can help you keep blood sugar and blood pressure under control. Here's what a doctor may recommend:

- **Medicines for high blood pressure or diabetes.** Medicines for hypertension, called antihypertensives, bring blood pressure down. There are also medicines that control blood sugar. Some people with diabetes may have to take insulin injections to manage their disease.
- **Lose weight.** Being overweight puts you at risk for both high blood pressure and diabetes. Losing extra weight lowers your risk.
- **Exercise.** Physical activity can reduce blood pressure and has positive effects on diabetes. Any type of exercise can help you? from sports, like walking or swimming, to gardening and housework. Be sure to check with your doctor about what exercise is safe for you.

Your doctor may also suggest a special diet, such as a diet low in salt and fat and high in fruits and vegetables. He or she may also ask you to limit your consumption of alcohol to 2 drinks a day for men and 1 drink a day for women.

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By following your doctor's instructions and living a healthier lifestyle, you can control both diabetes and high blood pressure. It's well worth the effort to protect your heart.



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