

## February is Heart Month

### What is the connection between diabetes, heart disease, and stroke?

Diabetes itself is a risk factor for heart disease and stroke reports, Debbie Lay RN from the Fayette County Health Department Diabetes Prevention and Control Program. She stresses this important statistic, that if you have diabetes, you are at least twice as likely as someone who does not have diabetes to have heart disease or a stroke. People with diabetes also tend to develop heart disease or have strokes at an earlier age than other people. High glucose levels over time can lead to increased deposits of fatty materials on the insides of the blood vessel walls. These deposits may affect blood flow, increasing the change of clogging and hardening of blood vessels (atherosclerosis). You can take steps to control the other risk factors for heart disease. They include central obesity (carrying extra weight around the waist). Abdominal fat can increase the production of LDL (bad) cholesterol, the type of blood fat that can be deposited on the inside of blood vessel walls. Hypertension is another risk factor. If you have high blood pressure, your heart must work harder to pump blood. High blood pressure can strain the heart, damage blood vessels, and increase your risk of heart attack, stroke, and other problems. Smoking doubles your risk of getting heart disease. Stopping smoking is especially important for people with diabetes because both smoking and diabetes narrow blood vessels. Narrow and clogged blood vessels make it harder for enough blood to get to all parts of your body.

Healthy lifestyles can help prevent cardiovascular disease. Even if you are at high risk for heart disease and stroke, you can help keep your heart and blood vessels healthy by taking the following steps:

- **Make sure that your diet is heart healthy.** High in fiber, such as oat bran, oatmeal, whole-grain breads and cereals, fruits and vegetables. Cut back on foods high in saturated fat or cholesterol, such as meats, butter, dairy products with fat, eggs, shortening, lard, and foods with palm oil or coconut oil. Lower salt intake.
- **Make physical activity part of your routine.** Aim for at least 30 minutes of exercise most days of the week.
- **Reach and maintain a healthy body weight.** If you are overweight aim for a loss of no more than 1 to 2 pounds a week.
- **If you smoke, quit.** Your doctor can help you find ways to quit smoking. The Illinois Tobacco QuitLine 1-866-Quit-Yes can also help.
- **Ask your doctor whether you should take aspirin.** Studies have shown that taking a low dose of aspirin every day can help reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke. However aspirin is not safe for everyone. Your doctor can tell you whether taking aspirin is right for you.
- **Get prompt treatment for transient ischemic attacks (TIA's).** Early treatment for TIA's sometimes called mini-strokes, may help prevent or delay a future stroke. Signs of a TIA are sudden weakness, loss of balance, numbness, confusion, blindness in one or both eyes, double vision, difficulty speaking, or a severe headache.

For information on diabetes contact the health department at 618-283-1044 or visit the web at [www.fayettehealthdept.org](http://www.fayettehealthdept.org).