

DIABETES: STANDARDS OF CARE

The best way to deal with diabetes is to learn as much as you can about taking care of yourself. The following standards of care are taken from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality and the American Diabetes Association. These standards can help reduce your risk of problems:

A1C - This blood test measures blood sugar control over the past 90 days. The closer your A1C is to that of people without diabetes, the less chance you have of damaging your heart, eyes, kidneys, and blood vessels. Your A1C should be tested two to four times a year, depending on what type of diabetes you have and how often your doctor recommends it. The goal for your A1C should be 7 or less.

Fasting lipid profile - Diabetics have heart attacks at a higher rate and at an earlier age than those without diabetes. High levels of lipids (fats) in the blood can lead to heart attack. By knowing what your blood lipid levels are, you and your doctor can work together to develop a plan to decrease your risk of a heart attack. Your doctor can test lipid levels with a simple blood test. This should be done yearly. It can be done every two years if your lipid levels are low risk. The goal for adults with diabetes is to lower their LDL cholesterol to less than 100.

Blood pressure Diabetes and high blood pressure can lead to heart attacks, strokes or kidney disease. It is important to have your blood pressure checked regularly. The goal for your blood pressure should be 130/80 or below if you have diabetes.

Dilated retinal eye examination - This exam is important in order to find any changes in the eyes. Left untreated, problems can lead to blindness. This exam should be done every year by an ophthalmologist or optometrist trained to look for diabetic eye disease.

Microalbumin / urine test - Protein in the urine can be a warning sign of kidney damage. A urine test for microalbumin can detect very small amounts of protein. If you have no signs of kidney disease, this urine test should be performed at least twice a year.

Foot inspection and examination - You should inspect your feet every day. Redness, warmth, swelling and calluses can be early warning signs that can lead to more serious foot problems. Loss of feeling in the feet is a major sign of nerve damage or injury, which can lead to amputation. An annual foot examination by your doctor determines how much feeling you have in your feet and helps your doctor find problems.

Flu vaccine - Many people with the flu are hospitalized annually. If a person with diabetes catches the flu, he or she will likely become much sicker than a person without diabetes. A yearly flu vaccination can help you avoid the most serious kinds of flu.

Pneumonia vaccine - Pneumonia can be a serious problem for people with diabetes. Being vaccinated for pneumonia once before age 65 can lessen your chance of catching pneumonia. People over 65 should check with their doctor about the need for a pneumonia vaccine booster shot.