

# Your Health Matters



## What are the Complications of Diabetes?

### What can You do to Protect Yourself?

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### *What are the complications of Diabetes?*

When a person has high blood sugars for a long time, complications can happen in both the small (microvascular) and the large (macrovascular) blood vessels of your body. You can prevent these complications. Two recent studies called the Diabetes Control and Complications Trial (DCCT) and the United Kingdom Prospective Diabetes Study (UKPDS) showed that by controlling your blood sugar and blood pressure you could keep complications from happening to you. Or if you have already experienced some complications of diabetes, you could prevent them from getting worse. This pamphlet will tell you about diabetes complications and how you can protect yourself.

### *Microvascular Complications:*

These are complications of the small blood vessels in your:

- Eyes (retinopathy)
- Kidneys (nephropathy)
- Nerves (neuropathy)

These complications can happen in both Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes.

### *What can you do to stop microvascular complications?*

To protect yourself from **all of these complications:**

- Control your blood sugar
- Control your blood pressure
- Don't smoke or quit if you do

**For your eyes,** have a dilated eye exam every year by an ophthalmologist.

**For your kidneys,** have a test for protein in the urine every year, eat a moderate amount of protein, and don't overuse drugs like Motrin, Advil, or Aleve.

## ***What do you do if you already have some microvascular complications?***

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**For all complications**, control your blood sugar, control your blood pressure and if you smoke, quit.

**For your eyes**, talk to your ophthalmologist about possible laser treatment. Ninety-five percent of cases of blindness can be prevented with timely laser treatment.

**For your kidneys**, talk to your doctor about taking medications called ACE inhibitors. These medications can protect your kidneys.

**For your nerves**, talk to your doctor about the different medications available to treat nerve problems and pain.

(Also see the foot care section of this pamphlet.)

## ***Macrovascular Complications:***

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These complications happen in the large blood vessels of the body. Macrovascular complications can cause:

Heart disease (coronary artery disease and angina)

Stroke (cerebral vascular accidents)

Problems with the feet and calves (peripheral vascular disease)

These complications are more common in Type 2 diabetes when a person has had high blood sugar and high cholesterol for a long time. People with Type 1 diabetes are also at risk.

## ***What can you do to prevent macrovascular complications?***

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Control your cholesterol

Control your blood pressure

Control your blood sugar

Lose weight if you need to

Exercise

Quit smoking

## ***To help you accomplish all of these things and avoid micro and macrovascular complications:***

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See a registered dietitian to help you plan a safe, healthy diet.

Check your blood sugar as recommended by your diabetes care team.

See your doctor for treatment of high cholesterol and high blood pressure.

You may need to see your doctor when you start an exercise program.



## ***Footnotes about footcare:***

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Foot problems in diabetes are a combination of microvascular complications (neuropathy) and macrovascular complications (peripheral vascular disease). There is less sensation in the feet and less fresh blood flow to the feet. These can cause:

- Painful “pins and needles”
- Slow-healing infections
- Risk of amputations

Foot problems can occur in both Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes.

## ***What can you do to protect your feet?***

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- Wash and check your feet every day.
- See your doctor if you have any cuts, blisters or foot or nail infections.
- Control your blood sugar.
- Control your blood pressure.
- Don't smoke or quit if you do.
- Know if your feet are “at-risk”.

## ***What are “at-risk” feet?***

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“At-risk” feet are feet or a foot that has less sensation or blood flow than normal. You may not be able to feel when you are getting a blister or a painful spot in your shoe. You could be at risk for an infection or problem in your feet.

At each visit with your doctor, take your shoes off so your doctor will know you want to have your feet checked.

## ***What is the UCSF Diabetes Teaching Center?***

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The UCSF Diabetes Teaching Center offers group classes and one-on-one sessions in the self-care of diabetes.

Call the UCSF Diabetes Teaching Center at (415) 476-5029 for more information about our classes and taking care of your diabetes.

For specialty diabetes care appointments with a doctor, dietitian and/or nurse, you can call the Diabetes Clinic at (415) 476-4497.