

Health Highlights: Heart health and Diabetes, Plus Start a Walking Program

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It's a good idea to keep an eye on your heart's health.

But Ash Al-Dadah, MD, a cardiologist with OSF HealthCare, estimates that more than half of the people with advanced heart disease who come through his door also have diabetes.

That puts them at greater risk for heart disease and related issues.

His advice? Listen to your body. Shortness of breath and chest pain are hallmark symptoms.

Also, look for open sores or wounds or burning in your calves. Keeping a healthy diet is also important.

“It’s a tough task. But with repetition and practice comes perfection. If you keep doing it daily, you’ll be able to master your diet in order to reduce your glucose levels and get control over your diabetes. It also leads to weight loss, which is the most helpful thing reduce the risk of diabetes complications,” Dr. Al-Dadah says.

Mastering your diet looks like cutting out high carb foods, being active and monitoring both your glucose levels and what you eat.

Speaking of being active, it's no secret that walking is good for you.

Walking improves fitness, reduces pain, eases depression and helps with circulation and posture.

It may sound counterintuitive, but walking also increases our serotonin levels and reduces fatigue.

It's especially good for older adults. According to Nancy Dagefoerde, a nurse practitioner with the OSF Cardiovascular Institute, for people 60 and older, the more steps taken, the lower their risk for cardiovascular disease.

“Heart health or cardiovascular risk increases as we age. So, if a person is sedentary, they're adding to that risk, and it's also important for balance and movement in general and just overall health and reduction of health problems,” Dagefoerde says. “That's why it is especially important for older people.”

Dagefoerde says the benefit of walking slowly is it burns more calories and is easier on the joints. Brisk walking helps fight developing heart disease, cancer and dementia.