

Know Your Numbers, Protect Your Heart

How cholesterol, diabetes, blood pressure & Lp(a) affect heart health



Simple steps you can take
to lower your risk.



Why are we talking about risk factors?

Heart disease usually develops over time.

Several things can raise the chance of heart attack, stroke, or other blood-vessel problems.

Some are controllable — and that is good news.

Small, steady changes can improve blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, fitness, and overall risk.

Cardiac rehab gives you a safe place to practice those changes.



Think of it this way

Your heart is the pump.
Your arteries are the pipes.

Goal

Keep the pump strong and the pipes open.

Remember

Risk is not destiny.



The “Big Four” we can work on

1. Cholesterol

Especially LDL (“bad” cholesterol).
Too much can contribute to plaque in arteries.

2. Blood pressure

High pressure puts extra force on artery walls and the heart.

3. Diabetes / blood sugar

High blood sugar over time can damage blood vessels and often travels with other risk factors.

4. Lifestyle

Activity, food choices, smoking, sleep, weight, and alcohol can all affect risk.

And one important inherited factor: Lp(a)



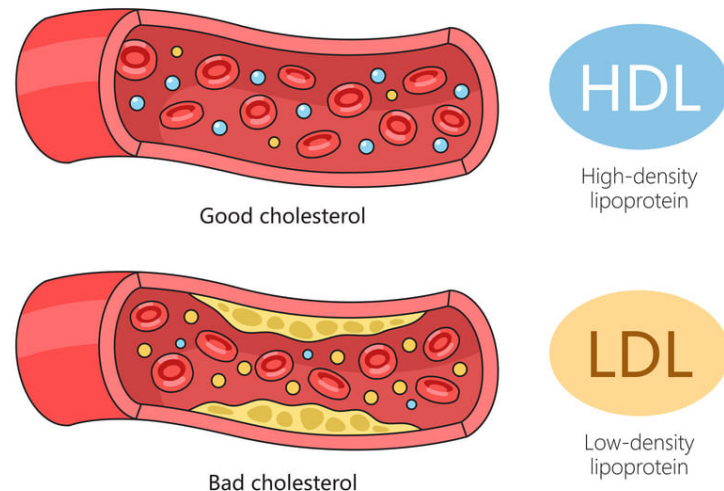
Cholesterol: what does it mean?

Cholesterol is a waxy substance your body needs.

LDL is often called “bad” cholesterol. When LDL stays high, it can help build plaque in artery walls.

HDL is often called “good” cholesterol. It is part of the overall picture, but we do not treat HDL as a stand-alone target.

Triglycerides are another type of blood fat. High levels can add to cardiovascular risk, especially with other problems.



Easy picture

Too much LDL can be like extra material collecting inside a pipe.

Your test

A lipid panel checks LDL, HDL and triglycerides.

Ask

“What is my LDL goal?”



Diabetes: why does blood sugar matter?

Diabetes means blood sugar is too high because the body does not make or use insulin properly.

Over time, high blood sugar can damage blood vessels.

Diabetes often occurs with high blood pressure and unhealthy cholesterol levels — together, these can raise heart risk.

Managing blood sugar is one part of protecting your heart.

Simple goal

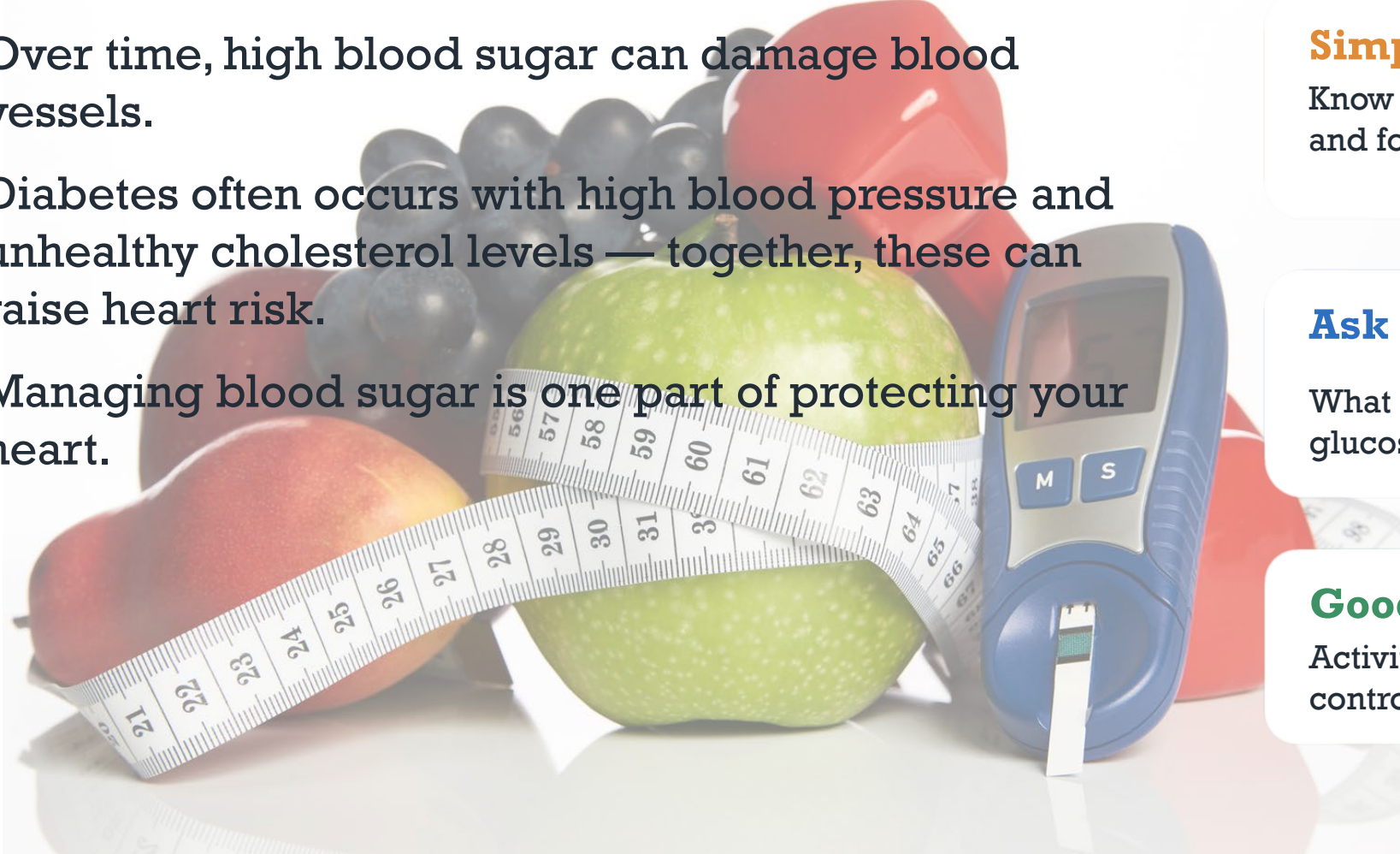
Know your blood sugar plan and follow it.

Ask your team

What should my A1C or glucose goal be?

Good news

Activity can help blood sugar control.



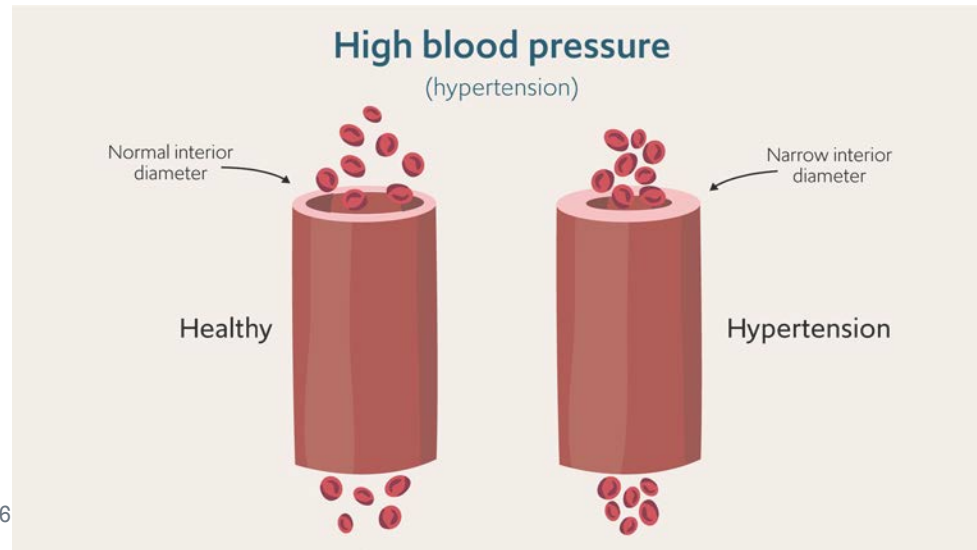
High blood pressure: the pressure on the pipes

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against artery walls.

When it stays high, it can damage blood vessels and make the heart work harder.

High blood pressure often has no symptoms — so checking it matters.

Home readings can be useful when your healthcare team recommends them.



Think: garden hose

Too much pressure over time can wear on the hose.

What helps?

Regular activity, less sodium when appropriate, healthy eating, weight management, and prescribed medicine.

Ask

“What blood pressure range is right for me?”



Lp(a): the risk factor you may not hear about

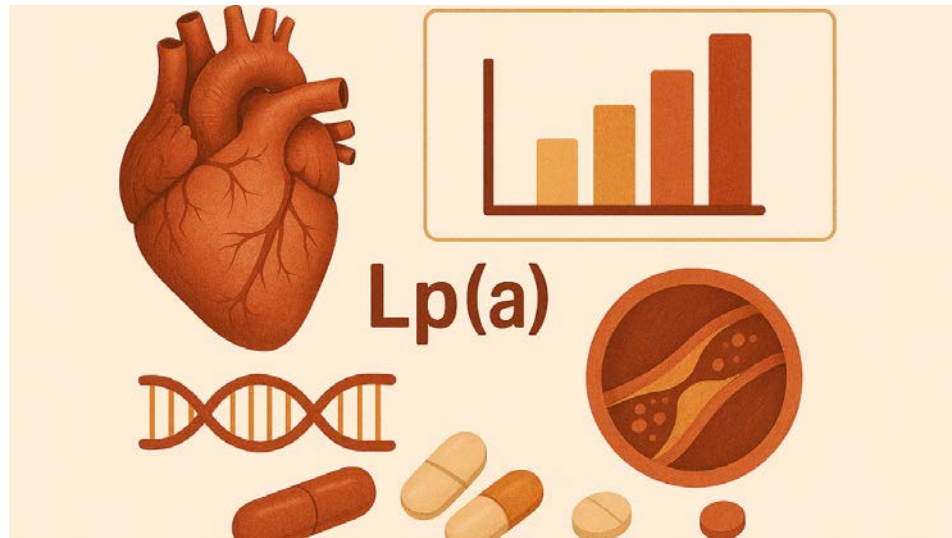
Lp(a) stands for lipoprotein(a). Say: “L-P little a.”

It is a type of cholesterol-carrying particle in the blood.

Your Lp(a) level is mostly inherited from your parents.

High Lp(a) can increase the chance of plaque and cardiovascular disease — even when LDL is not very high.

Lifestyle changes usually do not lower the Lp(a) number itself.



The good news

You can still lower your overall risk by controlling the things you can change.

Ask

“Have I ever had an Lp(a) test?”

Family matters

If Lp(a) is high, ask whether family members should be tested.



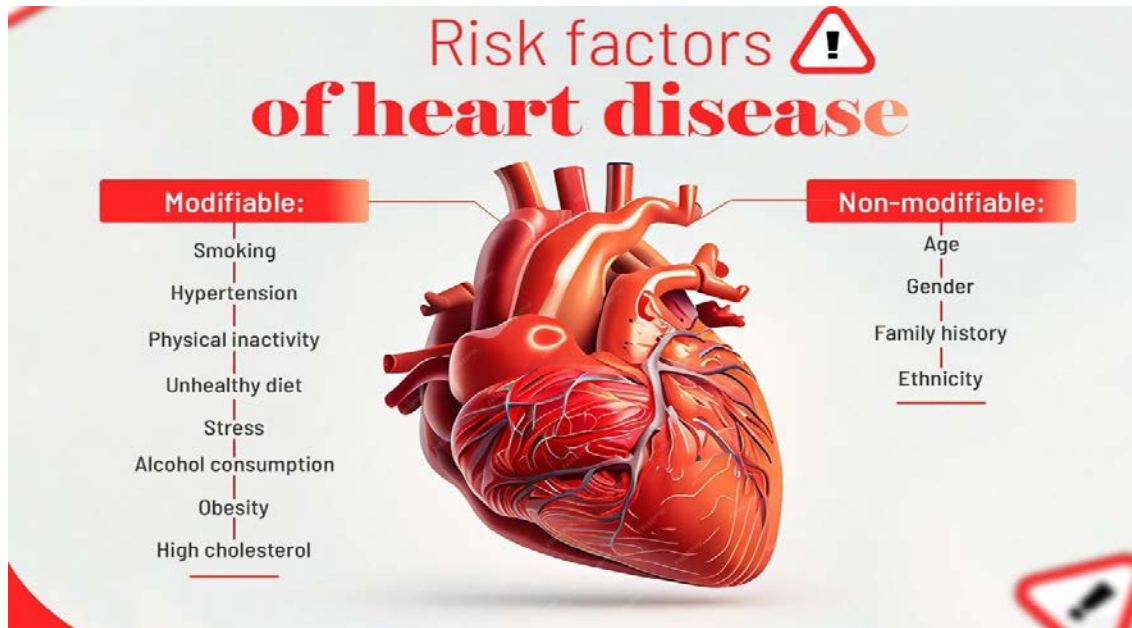
Why do these risks matter more together?

These factors can overlap.

For example: diabetes + high blood pressure + high LDL can place extra stress on blood vessels.

An inherited high Lp(a) can add another layer of risk.

Think of risk as a team effort: improving several areas can make a meaningful difference.



One risk

A single leak in a pipe.

Several risks

More than one problem at the same time.

Our strategy

Work on the factors we can change.



What can YOU do?

Move

Use cardiac rehab exercise safely and build activity over time.

Eat for your heart

More vegetables, fruits, beans, whole grains, nuts, fish/lean protein; less saturated fat, excess sodium and highly processed foods.

Don't smoke

Quitting is one of the most powerful steps for heart health.

Take medicines

Take prescribed medicines as directed.
Ask before stopping or changing them.

Know your numbers

BP • LDL • triglycerides
• blood sugar/A1C
• Lp(a) when appropriate

Sleep & stress

Aim for healthy sleep and use stress-management strategies that work for you.

You do NOT have to change everything at once.

Pick one small change you can repeat.



A simple plan: Know • Act • Recheck

KNOW

Know your numbers and what they mean for YOU.

ACT

Exercise, eat well, take medicines, don't smoke, and follow your care plan.

RECHECK

Keep appointments and repeat labs or home measurements when advised.

Bring questions to your healthcare team.

Your targets may be different from someone else's.

Progress counts — even when it is gradual.



Questions to ask your healthcare team

“What is my LDL goal?”

“What should my blood pressure usually be?”

“What is my A1C or blood sugar goal?”

“Should I have an Lp(a) test?”

“Do I need to change or add a medicine?”

“What is the ONE thing you want me to focus on first?”

The best question may be: “What can I do next?”



Take-home message

Heart risk is more than one number

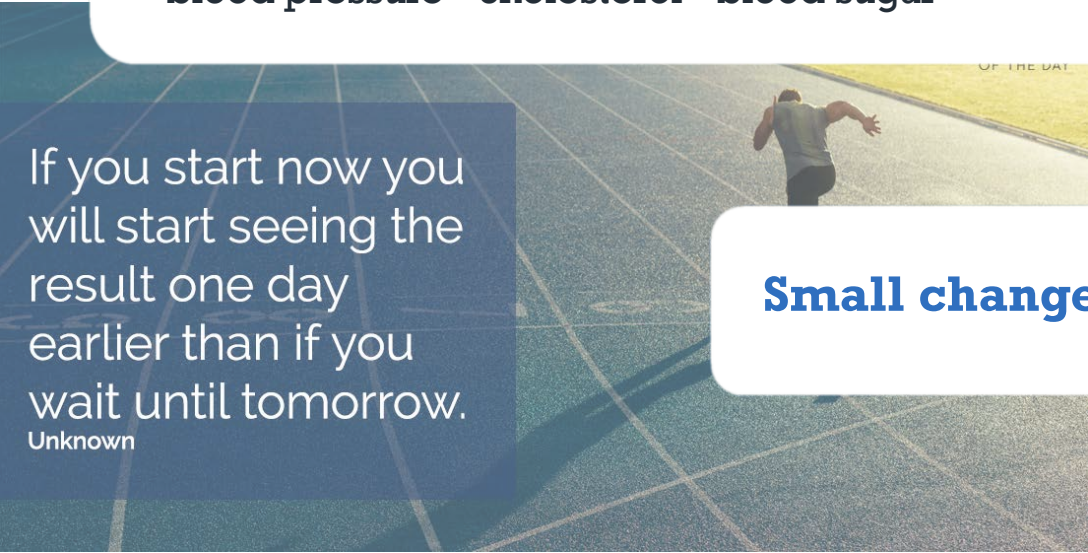
Cholesterol, blood pressure, diabetes, Lp(a), lifestyle, age, and family history all fit into the bigger picture.

Focus on what you can control

Activity • food • smoking • weight • sleep
• blood pressure • cholesterol • blood sugar

Don't let one number discourage you

A higher Lp(a), for example, does not mean you are powerless. It means we pay closer attention to the factors we CAN change.



If you start now you will start seeing the result one day earlier than if you wait until tomorrow.

Unknown

Small changes + consistency = better heart health over time.



Sources & presenter notes

American Heart Association — Understanding Cholesterol and Lipids; Cholesterol and Diabetes; Lipoprotein(a) and Heart Health; 2026 Dyslipidemia Guideline.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — Heart Disease Risk Factors; Diabetes and Your Heart; Preventing Heart Disease.

