

Heart disease

As with eyes and kidneys, protecting the heart depends on healthy blood vessels.....and healthy blood vessels depend on good blood sugar control. Even though heart attacks occur in adults, problems with high blood pressure and cholesterol can begin in childhood.

Blood pressure (BP) is checked at every visit and compared to the norms for age as hypertension is defined differently in children and adults. If either the systolic (top number) or diastolic (bottom number) is consistently above the 90th percentile for age, height and gender, lifestyle changes to reduce BP are recommended. Adolescents over the age of 18 are considered adults with a BP goal of less than 130/80. Lifestyle interventions would include dietary changes, exercise and weight loss (if overweight). If these changes do not bring BP into the normal range in 3-6 months, treatment with a blood pressure medication is considered. Using the ACE inhibitor type of medicine described in the section above is used as these medications help to prevent damage to the kidneys as well.

High cholesterol can also damage blood vessels. Poorly controlled diabetes alone can cause high cholesterol levels. Screening for high cholesterol can begin as early as age 2 years if there is a strong family of high cholesterol or heart attacks occurring in a family member before the age of 55. For children without a family history, cholesterol screening usually begins at around 10 years of age and is checked annually. If the LDL or “bad” cholesterol levels are greater than 100, improving blood sugar control, exercise and a diet low in saturated fat is recommended. If these measures are not effective in lowering the LDL level, cholesterol lowering medications called statins are considered for children 10 years or older. The goal of therapy is to maintain LDL levels less than 100 to promote healthy blood vessels.

Remember, Prevention and Tight BG Control are the Best Treatment!