

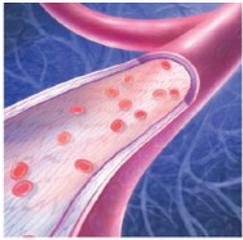


Introduction to the Long-term Complications of Diabetes

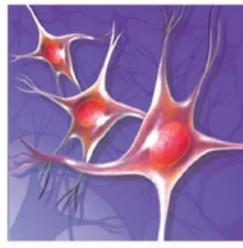
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Long-term complications are health problems that develop over a period of years as a result of high blood glucose levels. Over time, high blood glucose damages:

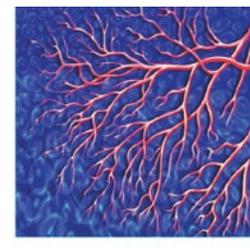
large blood vessels



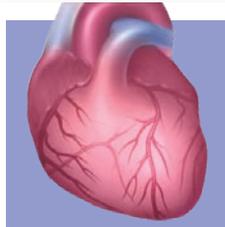
nerves



small blood vessels



The following problems may occur:



A heart attack may be caused by reduced blood flow to the heart muscle. The area of the heart muscle supplied by that blood vessel dies.

A stroke may result from decreased blood flow to the brain.



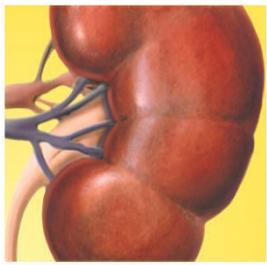
A loss of circulation to the legs and feet may cause pain, making cuts and sores very slow to heal.



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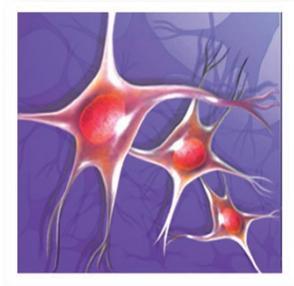
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High blood glucose can cause the tiny blood vessels in the eye to leak or break. New blood vessels can grow and cover the center of vision. This is called **diabetic retinopathy**, and may cause loss of vision or blindness.



Damage to the blood vessels in the kidneys can cause **diabetic nephropathy**. This can lead to kidney failure.

High blood glucose can also damage the nerves. **Neuropathy**, or nerve disease, can cause: pain; loss of feeling; and muscle weakness, usually in the hands, legs, and feet. It can also affect how the heart, bladder, digestive system, and sexual organs function.



Nerve disease and poor circulation, in combination with a skin breakdown – such as a cut or sore – may lead to the loss of a toe, foot, or leg.

The good news is that these complications can be prevented.

Work with your diabetes care team to set up a management plan to keep your blood glucose level in your target range.