

FAQ | WOMEN WITH DIABETES

- 1. Do more women develop diabetes than men?**

The prevalence of diabetes in both men and women is about the same. But women are more vulnerable to the effects of obesity, changing lifestyles and globalization. Increasing PCOS, gestational diabetes and prediabetes could make more women develop diabetes than men in the coming years.
- 2. What are the unique risk factors for diabetes in women?**

 1. Gestational diabetes
 2. Polycystic ovary syndrome
 3. Change in weight and body composition during and after menopause
- 3. Is diabetes a bigger risk for heart disease in women?**

Much higher. Women with diabetes have 4-5 times higher risk of heart disease than women without diabetes. Also women have atypical symptoms like shortness of breath, epigastric pain, shoulder pain, fatigue etc. Women also have poorer outcomes after a heart attack.
- 4. Are there different cut offs for diagnosis of diabetes or for CV risk factors?**

The cut offs are the same for both men and women for blood glucose and blood pressure. The difference is in waist circumference (less than 80cms for women and 88cms for men). The cut off level of LDL and triglyceride (type of lipids) are also same for both men and women. However HDL should be more than 50 for women and 40 for men.
- 5. Why are women more prone to obesity?**

Women are now juggling traditional roles at home and non-traditional new roles outside home. They have more kitchen gadgets and other help like washing machines, vacuum cleaners, mops, dish washers, grinders etc. They are also in the work force which is giving them less dedicated exercise time. There is also a greater dependence on fast food due to time constraints. Pregnancy, menopause and PCOS makes them more prone to gain weight.

6. Should women be more careful before getting pregnant?

Women with diabetes (also called pregestational diabetes) have to make many changes before getting pregnant. Their glucose control has to be optimized. BP medications have to be changed. Cholesterol medications have to be stopped, Folic acid has to be started. Certain oral diabetes medications have to be changed to insulin.

7. Is contraception safe for women with diabetes?

Very safe and very important. Women with diabetes must plan their pregnancies and unplanned pregnancies in women whose diabetes is not well controlled could lead to pregnancy losses and babies with birth defects. All forms of contraception are approved for women with diabetes.

8. Is menopause a more challenging time for women with diabetes?

Menopause causes certain body composition changes and cholesterol changes that may be more challenging for women with diabetes. Hot flushes and sweating could be mistaken for symptoms of low sugar and vice versa. Postmenopausal vaginal dryness and recurrent urinary tract infections could pose more difficulties for women with diabetes. Menopause changes lipid profile to one that is less friendly to the heart. The good cholesterol (HDL) goes down and the bad cholesterol (LDL) goes up.

9. Should women be on a different diet than men?

Women should be on a diet appropriate for their height and weight. The diet should be low in saturated fat, with more complex carbohydrates and soluble fibres. Women of India tend to eat late, fast for religious reasons and may have more chances for hypoglycemia.

10. What can women do for other women?

Women are great change agents. They can share, learn, motivate and help other women live longer healthier lives. They should talk to other women in the family, friends, colleagues and women in the community about risk factors for diabetes and how they can start making changes in their lifestyle. They can start a walking club, a support group or raise awareness in all the creative ways that they can.