

# Heart TALK

Heart-healthy and Stroke-free Living with Dr. Amy L. Doneen, DNP, ARNP

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Thoughts from Dr. Amy



## The Hidden Cause of Most Heart Attacks

It's very common for people to be diagnosed with type 2 diabetes soon after they've suffered a heart attack. While patients often chalk this double whammy up to bad luck, believing they've been hit with two seemingly unrelated disorders at once, there is actually a strong link between insulin resistance (IR)--the disorder that leads to type 2 diabetes--and heart attack risk.

In [a study](#) of patients treated in the ER for a heart attack, the researchers found that after excluding known diabetics, 66 percent of the remaining patients had abnormal blood sugar levels that met criteria for diabetes or prediabetes, an earlier stage of the disease. Collectively, these two conditions affect 115 million Americans, many of whom are undiagnosed, escalating their risk for heart attacks and other serious complications. With November marking National Diabetes Month, here's what you need know about IR and its warning signs, a simple test to accurately diagnose it, and the easiest ways to prevent diabetes, even if you're already prediabetic.

### 1. Insulin resistance delivers a one-two punch to the cardiovascular system.

The root cause of more than 70 percent of heart attacks, many strokes and almost all cases of type 2 diabetes, IR occurs when cells become insensitive to insulin, a hormone that normally helps the body use glucose for energy. The pancreas is forced to pump out more and more insulin, trying to keep with demand, until its beta cells

become exhausted and blood sugar rises. Not only does this damage the arterial lining, making it easier to cholesterol to penetrate and form plaque, but IR triggers other biochemical changes, including chronic inflammation, raising risk that plaque, once formed, will rupture, leading to a heart attack or stroke.

### 2. A wide waist is the no. 1 warning sign of IR--even if you're not overweight.

Waist circumference is now considered a "vital sign"--on par with pulse and blood pressure--for assessing cardiovascular health. A waist measurement above 40 inches in a man, or above 35 inches in women, is the leading indicator of IR. Other potential tipoffs that you may be insulin resistant include having high triglycerides combined with low levels of HDL (good) cholesterol, high blood pressure, sleep deficiency (averaging less than 6 hours a night triples risk for prediabetes), and periodontal (gum) disease.

### 3. In the time it takes to watch a movie, you can get the best screening test for diabetes, prediabetes and IR--and it's covered by almost every health plan.

The American Diabetes Association (ADA) advises screening if you're 40 or older, or at a younger age if advised by your medical provider because of such factors as obesity or family history. The ADA rates the 2-hour oral glucose tolerance test (OGTT), in which you drink a sugary liquid after an overnight fast, as the "gold standard" in accuracy. Blood samples are drawn at the one- and two-hour marks to check glucose levels.

### 4. Other widely used diabetes screening tests often yield misleading results.

Several studies show that the A1c test, which doesn't require fasting, is not very reliable for detecting IR/prediabetes. For example, a 2011 Bale Doneen study presented at the 4th International Congress on Prediabetes and Metabolic

Syndrome found that of 547 patients checked with various blood sugar tests, the A1C test missed 63 percent of those with IR/prediabetes. Moreover, 27 percent of the patients who were classified as prediabetic by the A1C actually had normal blood sugar when checked with the highly accurate OGTT.

### 5. Losing as little as 7 pounds and working out more dramatically cuts risk for diabetes--even if you're already prediabetic.

In large studies, people with prediabetes who shed 5 to 7 percent of their body weight (7 to 10 pounds for a 150-pound person) and exercised at least 30 minutes, four times a week, were able to avoid progressing to full-blown diabetes 70 percent of the time. These two lifestyle changes also slash your risk for [metabolic syndrome](#), a cluster of abnormalities that triples risk for heart disease and quadruples it for diabetes. While everyone with metabolic syndrome, by definition, has IR, the opposite is not true: About half of those with IR don't meet criteria for metabolic syndrome.

### 6. Taking short "activity breaks" from sitting helps prevent IR.

Researchers recently reported that even among people who spent most of the day parked in a chair, those who took the most activity breaks--even ones as brief as a minute at a time--had, on average, thinner waists (by nearly two inches) and lower levels of inflammatory markers, triglycerides and blood sugar. To optimize cardiovascular health, we advise cutting down on TV and other screen time and spending a minimum of 22 minutes daily exercising. Check with your medical provider about which activities are most appropriate for you.

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## Peak Experience: A Heart Attack Survivor's Amazing Health Turnaround



Heart attack survivor Rudy Lindbloom and his wife, Linda, celebrate after summiting South Sister Mountain.

On August 2, 2014, Rudy Lindbloom woke up at 2 AM with a burning sensation in his chest. Initially, he thought it was heartburn, but when the pain intensified, he suspected it was something more serious. The then 66-year-old from Boise, Idaho began sweating heavily and asked his wife, Linda, to take him to the emergency room. "As we walked out of the bedroom I saw myself in the mirror--my skin had turned absolutely gray," he recalls.

At the hospital, he said two words that got immediate attention: "chest pain." Within minutes, he recalls, "There were 7 people working on me. I was given nitroglycerin and other meds, but the pain kept getting worse." Rudy was diagnosed with a heart attack and rushed to the cath lab, where the blocked artery was reopened with a stent. "Because I was treated so quickly, I avoided permanent heart damage."

Ironically, the heart attack occurred when Rudy was already working to improve his health. The 6'1" businessman had improved his diet and shed 18 pounds, bringing his weight down to 172 pounds. He'd never smoked and had normal blood pressure. "The cardiologist at the hospital said all of my labs were excellent. He prescribed a cocktail of pills and said to come back in a year," adds Rudy, who was told that his genes were probably the culprit.

That made sense, since his dad had four heart attacks--starting at age 50--and died from cardiac arrest at age 70. Many of his other paternal relatives also died from heart disease. "Linda and I wanted to know what to do about my genetic risks and found Dr. Amy Doneen's book, [Beat the Heart Attack Gene](#)," he says. "When I read it, the Bale Doneen Method sounded like what I needed. I was impressed that there were 50 pages of footnotes about all the scientific studies behind this approach."

When Rudy came to the Heart Attack & Stroke Prevention Center in Spokane for a comprehensive evaluation, the 2-hour oral glucose tolerance test discussed on page 1 of this newsletter revealed that he was insulin resistant. Like many people with IR, he had high levels of inflammation. This meant the medications he was taking were not doing enough to prevent a repeat heart attack. He was switched to a different statin that's more effective for people with IR, which successfully quelled the fire in his arteries.

Genetic testing confirmed that genes did indeed play a role in his heart attack since he has two genes that predict cardiovascular danger. This discovery had important implications for his treatment, since people with his genetic profile do best if they eat a very low-fat, gluten-free diet, limit or avoid alcohol, and take certain dietary supplements. And while the previously sedentary businessman was on the right track by losing weight,

he needed to get a lot more exercise to reduce the risk that his IR would progress to full-blown diabetes.

Rudy and Linda, who enjoy hiking, made it their goal to get in great shape, then climb a mountain. They trained four times a week in a local indoor mall, briskly walking its two-mile perimeter and running up and down the stairs (averaging 40 flights per workout). Once a week they hiked up and down a small mountain near their home. In 2015, they attempted to summit Mt. Borah, at over 12,600 feet the highest mountain in Idaho, but had to turn back before reaching the summit due to fatigue.

This year, buoyed by the good news that the Bale Doneen Method had stabilized the plaque in Rudy's arteries (meaning that he was no longer at risk for a repeat heart attack), the couple intensified their training, and set a new goal of climbing South Sister, which at 10,358 feet is the third highest mountain in Oregon. Their 41-year-old son, Scott, a superb athlete who lives in Bend, Oregon, joined them in this attempt.

"After six hours of hard climbing, with the last mile being a 30-to-40 degree slope with loose rock, we finally summited," says Rudy, now 68. "The view from the top was really magnificent and I felt somewhere north of ecstatic at how far I'd come since my heart attack."

## Gluten-free Apple-Cranberry Turkey Stuffing

Research suggests that an apple a day really can help keep the doctor away! Packed with disease-fighting antioxidants, apples have a wide range of health benefits. In studies, they've been shown to help lower cholesterol and markers of inflammation in artery walls, and may help regulate blood sugar. This delicious, gluten-free recipe will give your family a lot to celebrate on Thanksgiving! For a flavor variation, add 1/2 cup of chopped dried apricots or pecans to recipe.

### Recipes for the heart

#### Ingredients

1/2 cup dried cranberries	2 medium Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored and chopped into 1/2 inch cubes (about 2 cups)
1 cup or more low-salt or salt-free chicken broth	1/2 cup finely chopped Italian parsley
1 loaf gluten-free bread, cut into 1-inch cubes	2 tablespoons fresh, chopped sage
1/4 cup grapeseed oil or olive oil	2 large eggs
2 cups chopped onion	
1 cup chopped celery	

Soak cranberries in chicken broth for at least one hour. Meanwhile, bake bread cubes on a parchment-lined or nonstick baking pan for 10 minutes at 350 degrees, turning once to bake evenly. Set aside to cool. Sauté onion and celery in oil until soft (about 15 minutes), stirring frequently. Add apples and herbs and cook 3 more minutes until apples begin to soften. Put mixture into a very large bowl and combine with cooled bread cubes. Whisk eggs into cranberry-chicken broth mixture, then pour over stuffing, tossing well. Add broth in 1/4 cup amounts if mixture is too dry. Bake stuffing in a 9 X 13 baking pan at 350 degrees, uncovered, until browned on top and cooked through (about 50 minutes). Cool for 10-15 minutes and serve.

Adapted from [Elenaspantry.com](#) and [Bonappetit.com](#).