

Nutrition for Diabetics



Nutrition is an important part of good diabetes control. By eating well-balanced meals in the correct amounts, you can keep your blood glucose level as close to normal as possible. **A healthy diet can also prevent diabetes from progressing to the next level and allow you to avoid dependence on medication.**

People with diabetes have the same nutritional needs as anyone else. Good diabetic nutrition means eating a **variety** of foods. It's important to eat foods from each food group every day to ensure the body has all the nutrients it needs.

New Information About Sugar

In the past, people with diabetes were told to avoid sugar. Now we know that total carbohydrate intake is what influences blood sugar. Thus, sugar can be consumed if it is counted as part of the carbohydrate intake for the day. Keep in mind, however, that sugary products often have few nutrients and many calories. Foods high in sugar include: fruit drinks/ades, desserts such as cake and pie, sugary breakfast foods, table sugar, honey, and syrup. One 12-ounce can of a regular soft drink has nine teaspoons of sugar. Although you need not avoid sugar altogether, it is a good idea to reduce intake of these empty calorie items so that other more nutritious foods can be enjoyed.

Healthy tips:

- Choose fruit for a sweet snack
- Choose low calorie drinks
- Add extra water to products that are very sweet
- Rinse foods that are canned in heavy syrup with water

Carbohydrates give you energy. The total amount of carbohydrates consumed is more important than the source or type in relation to blood sugar. There are many foods that contain carbohydrates. You can find the amount of carbohydrates in each serving of food by looking at the Nutrition Label. Carbohydrate intake recommendations should be discussed on an individual basis with a doctor or dietitian specializing in diabetes care.

Protein is needed for growth and is a good back-up supply of energy. Most adults in the US eat at least 50% more protein than required. Long term effects of high protein diets are unknown, therefore intake should not exceed 20% of daily calories. Healthy protein choices include legumes (i.e. dried beans), fish, lean meats and low-fat dairy products.

Fiber is important for diabetic nutrition as well. Fiber comes from plants and grains and can help to lower blood sugar levels. Foods high in fiber include: bran cereals, cooked beans and peas, whole-grain bread, fruits, and vegetables.

Fat Saturated fat and hydrogenated/trans fats have no health benefits and should be avoided when possible. Too much fat or cholesterol can increase the chances of heart disease and/or hardening of the arteries. People with diabetes have a greater risk of developing these diseases. It is very important to limit these fats in the diet.

Saturated fat is found in many foods. Red meat, whole milk dairy products, egg yolks, butter, salad dressings, and many desserts are high in saturated fat.

Hydrogenated/Trans fats are found in many fried foods, snack foods, commercial peanut butters and margarines.

Foods containing monounsaturated or polyunsaturated fats do not contribute to heart disease, but should be limited due to their high caloric content. Foods that are high in fat contain more calories than other foods and can contribute to weight gain.

Healthy Tips:

- Choose fish, legumes, and skinless poultry
- Choose lean cuts of meat. Remove extra fat.
- Use cooking spray instead of butter or margarine.
- Drink nonfat milk.
- Limit the number of eggs you eat.

Salt/Sodium

Too much salt may worsen high blood pressure. Many foods contain salt. Sometimes, you can taste it (as in pickles or bacon). There is also hidden salt in many foods, such as cheeses, salad dressings, and canned soups. When using salt or fat, remember that a little goes a long way. Tips to reduce salt intake:

- Taste your food before adding salt
- Use herbs instead of salt for flavor
- Rinse canned foods with water to wash away salt
- Add extra water to canned soups that are high in sodium

How do you set up a plan for eating healthy foods?

You and your dietitian should work together to design a meal plan that's right for you and includes foods that you enjoy. A diabetes meal plan is a guide that tells you how much and what kinds of food you can choose to eat at meals and snack times.

A good meal plan should fit in with your schedule and eating habits. The right meal plan will also help keep your weight where it should be. Whether you need to lose weight, gain weight, or stay where you are, your meal plan can help.