

Glucose Control - Diabetic Diet

If you've been diagnosed with diabetes, your doctor has probably mentioned that you should pay careful attention to nutrition and diet as part of your treatment program. Nutrition experts say that there is no one diet for diabetes, but people with diabetes should follow the nutrition guidelines in the Food Pyramid, while paying special attention to carbohydrate intake. People with diabetes should also eat about the same amount of food at the same time each day to keep blood sugar levels stable.

Getting Started With Nutrition Treatment

If you've never attempted to eat a healthy, well-balanced diet before your diabetes diagnosis, it can be difficult to know where to get started. Try these tips from the American Dietetic Association:

- **Eat more starches** such as bread, cereal, and starchy vegetables. Aim for six servings a day or more. For example, have cold cereal with nonfat milk or a bagel with a teaspoon of jelly for breakfast. Another starch-adding strategy is to add cooked black beans, corn or garbanzo beans to salads or casseroles.
- **Eat five fruits and vegetables every day.** Have a piece of fruit or two as a snack, or add vegetables to chili, stir-fried dishes or stews. You can also pack raw vegetables for lunch or snacks.
- **Eat sugars and sweets in moderation.** Include your favorite sweets in your diet once or twice a week at most. Split a dessert to satisfy your sweet tooth while reducing the sugar, fat and calories.

Soluble fibers are found mainly in fruits, vegetables and some seeds, and are especially good for people with diabetes because they help to slow down or reduce the absorption of glucose from the intestines. Legumes, such as cooked kidney beans, are among the highest soluble fiber foods. Other fiber-containing foods, such as carrots, also have a positive effect on blood sugar levels. Insoluble fibers, found in bran, whole grains and nuts, act as intestinal scrubbers by cleaning out the lower gastrointestinal tract.

After a diabetes diagnosis, consider seeing a dietitian and developing a meal plan to get started. Taking into account your lifestyle, your medication, your weight and any medical conditions you may have in addition to diabetes as well as your favorite foods, the dietitian will help you create a diet that will prevent complications of diabetes and still give you the pleasure you've always had in eating. To find a diabetes teacher (nurse, dietitian, pharmacist and other health care professional), call the American Association of Diabetes Educators at 1-800-342-2382. If you want to find a dietitian near you, call the American Dietetic Association's National Center for Nutrition and Dietetics at 1-800-366-1655.

A Healthier Weight and Lifestyle

Reaching and maintaining a healthy weight is important for everyone with diabetes. Weight control is extremely important in treating type 2 diabetes because extra body fat makes it difficult for people with type 2 diabetes to make and use their own insulin. If you are overweight, losing just 10 to 20 pounds may improve your blood sugar control so much that you can stop taking or reduce your medication.

If you smoke and have been diagnosed with diabetes, your doctor will recommend that you quit because smoking makes problems caused by diabetes worse. People with diabetes can experience blood flow problems in the legs and feet, which can sometimes lead to amputation. Smoking can decrease blood flow even more. Smoking can also worsen sexual impotence in men, cause high levels of LDL cholesterol (the bad type of cholesterol), and can raise the risk of heart attack and stroke. If you have diabetes and you smoke, you need to quit.

Although alcohol in small amounts can be fit into your meal plan if your blood sugar is under good control, drinking alcohol on an empty stomach can cause low blood sugar. Alcohol can contribute to complications of diabetes, so ask your doctor how much alcohol can be included in your meal plan and then stick to it.

Moderating Sugar, Fat and Carbohydrates

If you've been diagnosed with diabetes, you may have a lot of lifestyle changes to make. Does that mean you have to give up sugar, fat and carbohydrates forever?

The body breaks down different types of foods at different rates. Carbohydrates (be it potato or table sugar) typically take from five minutes to three hours to digest, whereas protein takes three to six hours and fat can take eight or more hours. That's why different foods have different effects on blood sugar, such as why ice cream (higher in fat) raises blood sugar levels more slowly than potatoes. But people with diabetes don't always have to forgo desserts and sweets. They just have to be sure not to eat moderate amounts more than once or twice a week.

To control carbohydrates, try a technique called carbohydrate counting. Carbohydrate counting means counting the total number of grams of carbohydrate you should eat at a meal or planned snack time based on your medication and exercise habits. Then you can choose how to meet those carbohydrate needs. You'll probably use a carbohydrate counting book, which you can get at a supermarket or bookstore. If you want to learn how to count carbohydrates accurately, make an appointment with a dietitian or a diabetes educator.

Because people with diabetes are at higher risk for heart problems, it's often recommended that they limit fat below 30 percent of total daily calories by eating less overall fat and less saturated fat. They also need to watch cholesterol, choose smaller portions of lean meats, poultry and fish, and low or non-fat dairy products. Because high-protein diets such as the Atkins diets are high in fat, they are not usually recommended for people with diabetes.

Remember that it will take a while to learn how to adjust to the changes in your diet and lifestyle after a diabetes diagnosis. With practice and help, you can have a satisfying diet and keep your blood sugar under control, too.