

Diabetes and Nutrition

Why does it matter what I eat?

What you eat is closely connected to your blood sugar level. The right food choices will help you control your blood sugar level.

Do I have to follow a special diet?

There isn't one "diabetes diet." Your doctor will probably suggest that you work with a registered dietitian to design a meal plan. A meal plan is a guide that tells you how much and what kinds of food you can choose at meals and snack time. For most people with diabetes (and those without, too), a healthy diet for people with diabetes consists of 40% to 60% of calories from carbohydrates, 20% from protein and 30% or less from fat.

Can I eat any sugar?

Yes. In recent years, doctors have learned that eating some sugar doesn't usually cause problems for most people with diabetes—as long as it is part of a balanced diet. Just be careful about how much sugar you eat and try not to add sugar to foods.

What kinds of foods can I eat?

In general, at each meal you may have 2 to 5 choices (or up to 60 grams) of carbohydrates, 1 choice of protein and a certain amount of fat. Talk to your doctor or dietitian for specific advice.

Carbohydrates. Carbohydrates are found in fruits, vegetables, beans, dairy foods and starchy foods such as breads. Try to eat fresh fruits and vegetables rather than canned fruits (unless they are packed in water or their own juice), fruit juices or dried fruit. You may eat frozen or canned vegetables. Condiments such as nonfat mayonnaise, ketchup and mustard are also carbohydrates.

Protein. Protein is found in meat, poultry, fish, dairy products, beans and some vegetables. Try to eat poultry and fish more often than red meat. Don't eat poultry skin, and trim extra fat from all meat. Choose nonfat or reduced-fat cheeses and yogurts.

Fat. Butter, margarine, lard and oils add fat to food. Fat is also in many dairy and meat products. Try to avoid fried foods, mayonnaise-based dishes (unless they are made with fat-free mayo), egg yolks, bacon and high-fat dairy products. Your doctor or dietitian will tell you how many



grams of fat you may eat each day. When eating fat-free versions of foods (like mayonnaise and butter), check the label to see how many grams of carbohydrates they contain. (Keep in mind that these products also often have added sugar).

What is the exchange list?

The exchange list (see the sample) is a tool to help you plan healthy meals and snacks. To add variety to your diet, you can substitute foods for other foods in the same group. Some examples are listed at the right.

What if my blood sugar is below or above normal?

If your blood sugar is low, you may become cranky, tired, confused, shaky or sweaty (called hypoglycemia). This can happen after you have been working hard or exercising. You should check your blood sugar level and then drink fruit juice or a regular soda right away. This will usually bring your level back to normal.

However, if you are very thirsty, urinating a lot or having blurred vision, your blood sugar may be much too high. Check your blood sugar level and contact your doctor about what to do.

Sample Exchange List

Food group	You can have.....	Or exchange it for...
Fruit (Each serving contains about 15 grams carbohydrates)	1 small or medium piece of fresh fruit	1/2 cup fruit juice, canned or chopped fruit
Vegetable (Each serving contains about 5 grams carbohydrates)	1 cup raw vegetables	1/2 cup cooked vegetables or vegetable juice
Starch (Each serving contains about 15 grams carbohydrates)	1 slice or ounce bread	1/2 cup pasta, cereal, starchy vegetable
Sugar, honey, molasses	1 teaspoon	4 grams carbohydrates
Milk (does not include cream, yogurt or cheese)	1 cup milk	12 grams carbohydrates and 8 grams protein
Meat	1 ounce meat, fish, poultry, cheese or yogurt	1/2 cup dried beans
Fat (includes nuts, seeds and small amounts of bacon & peanut butter)	1 teaspoon oil, butter or margarine	5 grams fat

How can I learn more?

For more information, talk to your family doctor. You can also learn more by calling the American Diabetes Association at 800-232-3472 or visiting their web site at www.diabetes.org. Another resource is the American Dietetic Association. Their phone number is 800-366-1655, and their web site is www.eatright.org.



This handout was developed by the American Academy of Family Physicians in cooperation with the American Diabetes Association.



The American Academy of Family Physicians Foundation has favorably reviewed this material. Favorable review means that medical information is accurate, but does not imply endorsement of any conclusions presented.

This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.

The American Academy of Family Physicians provides health information on the World Wide Web at familydoctor.org.

© 1999-2000

American Academy of Family Physicians
11400 Tomahawk Creek Parkway, Leawood, KS 66211

Permission is granted to print and photocopy this material for nonprofit educational uses. Written permission is required for all other uses, including electronic uses.

349

Additional comments from your family doctor