

## Diabetes and healthy eating

Diabetes can be better managed through healthy eating, combined with regular physical activity and weight control. No special diets are required.

If you have diabetes, it is recommended that you follow a healthy eating plan based on high fibre carbohydrate foods such as wholegrain breads and cereals, vegetables and fruit. Limit your fat intake, especially saturated fat. Choose foods low in salt and consume only moderate amounts of sugars and food containing added sugars.

Reducing the serving size of your meals can also help you maintain a healthy body weight. It is recommended that you see a dietitian who can work with you to develop a healthy eating plan that is just right for you.

### Healthy eating and diabetes

If you have diabetes, healthy eating can help you to:

- Maintain general good health
- Control blood glucose levels
- Achieve normal blood lipid (fat) levels
- Maintain a healthy blood pressure
- Maintain a healthy body weight
- Prevent or slow the development of diabetes complications.

### No special diets are required

Healthy eating for people with diabetes is no different than for everyone else. You do not need to prepare separate meals or buy special foods, so relax and enjoy healthy eating with the rest of your family.

### Physical activity

Along with healthy eating, physical activity is important. Be as active as possible. Try to do at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity most days and make the most of other opportunities to be active.

### Basic eating guidelines

Follow this simple healthy eating plan if you have diabetes:

- Eat regular meals throughout the day.
- You may need to limit the serving size of your meals and snacks, as too much food will lead to an increase in body weight.
- Choose a food containing some carbohydrate at each meal. Examples of carbohydrate foods are bread, cereals, pasta, rice, fruit and starchy vegetables.
- Do not restrict your carbohydrate intake. Aim for at least 130g per day.
- Choose high fibre carbohydrate foods.
- Select a variety of healthy foods from the different food groups. Include breads and cereals, fruits, vegetables, low fat dairy products and lean meat.
- Limit saturated fats that are found in foods such as full fat dairy products (including cream, milk, icecream, yoghurt, butter and cheese), meat fat (trim the fat from meat and limit your intake of processed meats), fried foods, cakes, pastries and foods containing palm oil and coconut oil.
- Consume small amounts of unsaturated fats like olive, canola or sunflower oil, monounsaturated or polyunsaturated margarines, oily fish, avocado, seeds and nuts.
- Eat only occasionally baked items like cakes and biscuits, in small serves, even when they are low in fat.
- Avoid lollies and sweet soft drinks.
- Don't add salt when you cook or at the table and reduce the use of high salt foods.

- Limit alcohol to two standard drinks per day for men and one standard drink per day for women. Have at least two alcohol-free days per week.

### **Carbohydrates**

Carbohydrates are the best source of energy for your body. Carbohydrates are digested in the body to form glucose in the blood. The amount of carbohydrate in meals has a great impact on blood glucose levels. By eating regular meals and spreading carbohydrate foods evenly throughout the day, you can maintain energy levels without causing large rises in blood glucose levels.

If you take insulin or diabetes medication, you may also need to eat snacks between meals. Check with your diabetes educator or dietitian for advice and information on how to get the right amount of carbohydrate in your meal plan.

### **Glycaemic index**

Some carbohydrate foods release glucose into the bloodstream more quickly than others. Foods that produce a slower rise in blood glucose levels are described as having a low glycaemic index (GI) and can be helpful in blood glucose management.

Healthy carbohydrate foods that have a low GI include most cereals and breads that are high in fibre, pasta, fruit, legumes and dairy products. Aim to include at least one 'low GI' food per meal.

Some low GI foods may be high in fat and energy – for example, icecream and chocolate. Always check the list of ingredients and the energy (calorie or kilojoule) content of packaged foods.

The GI values of foods are only an average, taken from ten healthy people who can show large variations. People with diabetes are advised to test their blood glucose levels to determine the effect of various foods on their own blood glucose levels.

### **Sugar**

People with diabetes who follow a healthy eating plan can include some sugar in their diet. However, the sugar should be eaten in nutritious foods, such as breakfast cereals or low fat dairy products, rather than in sweets or soft drinks.

You can use artificial sweeteners to replace some sugar if it helps to reduce your total energy intake and control weight.

### **Eat less fat – especially saturated fat**

All fats are high in energy (kilojoules or calories). Eating too much fat can lead to weight gain, which may make it more difficult to manage your blood glucose levels and can increase blood fats (cholesterol and triglycerides). The type of fat you eat is also important. People with diabetes have a greater risk of developing heart disease so try to eat less saturated fat.

Foods high in saturated fat include meat fat, full fat dairy foods, cream, solid cooking fats (such as butter, lard, copha and ghee), oils such as palm and coconut, and products that contain these fats (for example fried foods, some cakes and biscuits and convenience foods).

When you do eat fats, choose mainly:

- **Polyunsaturated fats and oils** – found in polyunsaturated margarines (check the label); sunflower, safflower, soybean, corn, cottonseed, grapeseed and sesame oils; oily fish such as herring, mackerel, sardine, salmon and tuna; nuts and seeds.
- **Monounsaturated fats and oils** – such as canola or olive oil margarines; canola and olive oil; avocados, nuts and seeds.

### **Eat moderate amounts of protein**

The body uses protein for growth and repair. Most people only require one to two small serves of meat or other protein foods each day. Most protein foods do not directly affect your blood glucose levels. Protein foods include lean meat, poultry (without the skin), seafood, eggs (not fried), unsalted nuts, soy products such as tofu and legumes (dried beans and lentils). Legumes also contain carbohydrate, so they will impact on your blood glucose levels.

Some sample serves of protein foods that are low in fat include:

- Half a cup of peas, beans or lentils
- 90g to 120g of fish, seafood, lean meat or poultry without the skin
- Three daily serves of low fat or skim milk dairy foods such as 250ml of milk, 40g of cheese and 200g of yoghurt.

## Sample meal plan

Choose foods that you like and that satisfy you. Include carbohydrate foods in each meal or snack to help manage blood glucose levels. You can eat your main meal at lunch or dinner.

### Breakfast

Choose from:

- One cup of high fibre breakfast cereal with low fat milk and one piece of fruit; or
- Two slices of bread or toast – preferably wholegrain, wholemeal or high fibre white – with thinly spread margarine, peanut butter, jam, Vegemite, baked beans, grilled tomato or sardines
- Water, tea, coffee or 100ml of fruit juice.

### Light meal

- Soup (preferably one with vegetables and legumes, not one that is cream-based)
- One sandwich made with bread, one roll or six dry biscuits – preferably wholegrain or wholemeal – with thinly spread margarine or avocado
- Lots of salad vegetables
- 90g to 120g of lean meat, skinless poultry or seafood; or two eggs; or 40g of fat reduced cheese; or a half a cup of legumes (such as beans or lentils)
- One piece of fruit
- Water, tea or coffee.

### Main meal

- One cup of cooked rice or pasta or one medium potato
- Lots of other vegetables
- 90g to 120g of lean meat, skinless poultry or seafood; or half a cup of legumes (such as beans or lentils)
- One piece of fruit or one small tub of yoghurt
- Water, tea or coffee.

### Between meal snacks

Not everyone needs to include snacks between meals. Talk to your diabetes educator or dietitian if you are unsure. If you do include snacks, select healthy choices such as fruit (fresh or canned in natural juice), low fat yoghurt, a glass of low fat milk, wholegrain bread, fruit bread or high fibre crackers.

### Talk to a dietitian

People with diabetes should discuss their food habits with a dietitian, so that appropriate dietary recommendations can be tailored to each individual.

### Where to get help

- Your local community health centre
- An Accredited Practising Dietitian, contact the Dietitians Association of Australia
- Diabetes educator
- Diabetes Australia – Vic Tel. 1300 136 588
- Life! Taking Action on Diabetes Tel. 13 RISK (13 7475) – for information about preventing your risk of type 2 diabetes or to take a risk test online
- Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute Tel. (03) 9258 5000
- Your doctor

### Things to remember

- People with diabetes do not need a special diet.
- Include a wide variety of healthy foods in your diet.
- You may need to limit serving sizes to maintain or achieve a healthy weight.
- Meals should be based on high fibre carbohydrates and be low in total and saturated fats, added sugar and salt.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Diabetes Australia Victoria

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