

Food choices

for people with diabetes

Healthy eating for people with diabetes is no different to that which is recommended for everyone. By choosing healthy foods and being active you will help manage your blood glucose (sugar) levels and your weight. There is no need to prepare separate meals or buy special foods, so relax and enjoy healthy eating along with the whole family!

What should I eat?

To help manage your diabetes, your meals need to be:

- An appropriate size - not too large,
- Regular and spread evenly throughout the day.
- Lower in fat, particularly saturated fat.
- Based on high fibre carbohydrate foods such as wholegrain breads and cereals, beans, lentils, vegetables and fruits.

Along with healthy eating, regular physical activity can help you to manage your blood glucose levels, reduce your blood fats (cholesterol and triglycerides) and maintain a healthy weight.

Refer to Diabetes Australia's *Physical Activity and Type 2 Diabetes* information sheet about how to be active every day.

On the following pages, we give information about different types of foods and their effect on our health:

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Fat

Fats have the highest energy (kilojoule or calorie) content of all foods. Eating too much fat can put on weight which in the longrun may make it more difficult to manage your blood glucose levels. On the other hand small amounts of healthier fats add flavour to your food, may improve your health and reduce your risk of heart disease. Therefore, the type of fat you eat is important, as well as the amount.

Saturated fat

It is important to limit saturated fat because it raises your LDL ('bad') cholesterol levels. Saturated fat is found in animal foods like fatty meat, milk, butter and cheese. Vegetable fats that are saturated include palm oil (found in solid cooking fats, snack foods or convenience foods) and coconut products such as copha, coconut milk or cream.

To reduce saturated fat:

- Choose reduced or low fat milk, yoghurt, ice cream and custard.
- Choose lean meat and trim any fat off before cooking.
- Remove the skin from chicken (where possible, before cooking).
- Avoid using butter, lard, dripping, cream, sour cream, copha, coconut milk, coconut cream and hard cooking margarines.
- Limit the amount of cheese you eat and try reduced fat and low fat varieties.
- Limit pastries, cakes, puddings, chocolate and cream biscuits to special occasions.
- Limit pre-packaged biscuits, savoury packet snacks, cakes, frozen and convenience meals.
- Limit the use of processed deli meats (devon/polony/fritz/luncheon meat, chicken loaf, salami etc) and sausages.
- Avoid fried take away foods such as chips, fried chicken and battered fish and choose BBQ chicken (without the skin) and grilled fish instead.
- Avoid pies, sausage rolls and pasties.
- Rather than creamy sauces or dressings, choose those that are based on tomato, soy or other low fat ingredients. As some tomato and soy sauces can be high in salt, choose low-salt varieties or make them yourself without any added salt.
- Limit creamy style soups.

Polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fat

Some fat is important for good health. Use a variety of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated types to achieve a good balance.

Polyunsaturated fats include:

- Polyunsaturated margarines (check the label for the word 'polyunsaturated').
- Sunflower, safflower, soybean, corn, cottonseed, grapeseed and sesame oils.
- The fat found in oily fish such as herring, mackerel, sardine, salmon and tuna.

Monounsaturated fats include:

- Canola, olive or Sunola® margarines.
- Canola and olive oil.
- Avocado.

Seeds, nuts, nut spreads and peanut oil contain a combination of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fat.

Ideas for enjoying healthy fats

- Stir-fry meat and vegetables in a little canola oil (or oil spray) with garlic or chilli.
- Dress a salad or steamed vegetables with a little olive oil and lemon juice or vinegar.
- Sprinkle sesame seeds on steamed vegetables.
- Use linseed bread and spread a little canola margarine.
- Snack on a handful of unsalted nuts, or add some to a stir-fry or salad.
- Spread avocado on sandwiches and toast, or add to a salad.
- Eat more fish (at least three times a week) because it contains a special type of fat (omega 3) that is good for your heart.
- Do more dry roasting, grilling, microwaving and stir-frying in a non-stick pan.
- Avoid deep fried, battered and crumbed foods.

Carbohydrate

Carbohydrate foods are the best energy source for your body. When they are digested they break down to form glucose in the bloodstream. If you eat regular meals and spread your carbohydrate foods evenly throughout the day, you will help maintain your energy levels without causing large rises in your blood glucose levels. If you take insulin or diabetes tablets, you may need to eat between-meal snacks. Discuss this with your dietitian or diabetes educator.

All carbohydrate foods are digested to produce glucose but they do so at different rates – some slow, some fast. The glycaemic index or GI is a way of describing how a carbohydrate containing food affects blood glucose levels.

The amount of carbohydrate you eat is very important as too much causes higher blood glucose after your meal. The GI of foods may affect the blood glucose response. The best combination is to eat moderate amounts of carbohydrate and include high fibre foods that also have a low GI.

The foods listed below are high in carbohydrate. Those in bold have a low GI and are high in fibre. Recommended serving sizes are given.

- 2 slices of bread or 1 bread roll – especially wholegrain and wholemeal varieties such as **Burgen[®] Breads, PerforMAX[®], Ploughmans Wholegrain[®], Multigrain 9-grain[®]**.
- 1 cup of high fibre breakfast cereals – **rolled oats, All-bran[®], Mini Wheats[®] (whole wheat)** or 1/2 cup of **untoasted muesli**.
- 1 cup of **pasta**, rice (**Basmati**, or **Doongara**) and other grains such as **barley, bulgur** and couscous.
- 1/2 cup of **legumes** – **baked beans, kidney beans, chick peas, lentils, three bean mix**.
- 1 piece of fruit – all types such as **apples, oranges, peaches, bananas**, melons. Fruit is a good source of fibre; try to eat the whole fruit rather than drinking the juice.
- 200-250mls of milk products or dairy alternatives – choose low fat varieties of **milk, soy drink (calcium fortified), custard** and **yoghurt**.
- 1 cup or 1 medium vegetable with a significant amount of carbohydrate – **potatoes, sweet potato, yams**.
- Other vegetables (such as salad vegetables, green vegetables, and orange vegetables) are generally low in carbohydrate and therefore have little effect on your blood glucose levels. Include at least five serves of vegetables each day.
- Occasional food containing carbohydrate eg: 2 dry biscuits, 1-2 sweet biscuits.

People need to consider a food's other nutritional qualities such as fat, sugar and salt content. While some high fat foods and many sugary foods have a low GI, such as chocolate ice-cream and toasted muesli, they are still not suitable for everyday eating.

Sugar

A healthy eating plan for diabetes can include some sugar. However, it is still important to consider the nutritional value of the foods you eat. In general, foods with added sugars should be consumed sparingly (manufacturers sometimes use fruit juice or other sources of sugar to avoid using table sugar). In particular, high energy foods such as sweets, lollies and standard soft drinks should not be consumed.

Some sugar may also be used in cooking and many recipes can be modified to use less than the amount stated or substituted with an alternative sweetener. Select recipes that are low in fat (particularly saturated fat) and contain some fibre.

Alternative sweeteners

While it is no longer necessary to always use alternative sweeteners instead of sugar, there is still a place for artificially sweetened products, particularly those that may be consumed in large amounts such as cordials and soft drinks.

Alternative sweeteners based on aspartame (951)*, sucralose (955)*, cyclamate (952)*, saccharin (954)* or acesulphame K (950)* are all suitable for people with diabetes. They don't provide energy, won't affect blood glucose levels and are found in many low joule products. If you wish to use artificial sweeteners but are concerned they may be harmful, try using different types. This will make it even more unlikely they will cause problems.

Acesulphame K (950)*, aspartame (951)*, isomalt (953)*, sucralose (955)* and alitame (956)* in small amounts are considered suitable for pregnant women.

**This number may appear on the ingredient list in place of the name.*

Protein

Choose protein foods that are also low in fat. This will help to reduce the amount of saturated fat you eat. Protein foods include lean meat, poultry without the skin, seafood, eggs (not fried), unsalted nuts, soy products such as tofu and pulses (dried beans and lentils).

Other foods, condiments and drinks

You can use these foods to add flavour and variety to your meals:

- Herbs, spices, garlic, chilli, lemon juice, vinegar and other seasonings.
- Products labelled 'low joule' eg: low joule/diet soft drinks, low joule jelly.
- Tea, coffee, herbal tea, water, soda water, plain mineral water.

Alcohol

If you enjoy alcohol, it is generally acceptable to have two standard drinks a day if you are a woman and four standard drinks a day if you are a man and aim to have at least two alcohol-free days a week. However, if you need to lose weight, you may need to limit your alcohol intake further. It's best to drink alcohol with a meal or some carbohydrate containing food.

One standard drink is equal to:

| | |
|--|----------------------|
| 100mL wine | 285 mL regular beer |
| 30 mL spirits | 60 mL fortified wine |
| 375 mL low-alcohol beer (less than 3% alcohol) | |

It is important to remember:

- That **all alcoholic drinks are high in kilojoules** and can contribute to weight gain.
- That low alcohol or 'lite' beers are a better choice than regular or diet beers because they are lower in alcohol.
- When mixing drinks use low joule/diet mixers such as diet cola, diet ginger ale, diet tonic water.
- That **drinking a lot of alcohol can cause hypoglycaemia** if you are taking insulin or certain diabetes tablets.
- To discuss alcohol with your doctor or dietitian and refer to Diabetes Australia's *Alcohol and Diabetes* information sheet.

Weight management

Being overweight, especially around your waistline, makes it more difficult to manage your diabetes and increases your risk of heart disease.

A small weight loss (5-10% of body weight) can make a big difference to your health but if you need to lose more weight and can, you should certainly do so. Measuring your waistline is a great way of checking your weight rather than weighing yourself regularly. In general, if you are of Caucasian origin, women should aim for a waist circumference less than 80 cm and men should aim for less than 94 cm. Appropriate measurements for other ethnic groups can be checked with your doctor.

If you are carrying excess weight around the middle, try to lose some of it by:

- Following a diet plan lower in kilojoules and total fat (particularly saturated fat).
- Doing regular physical activity such as walking, dancing, riding a bike or swimming.
- Asking your doctor, dietitian, diabetes educator or Diabetes Australia for advice.

An example of a typical meal plan for one day

Choose foods you like and which satisfy you and remember to include carbohydrate foods in each meal or snack to help manage your blood glucose levels. Carbohydrate-containing foods are highlighted in *italics* in the menu below.

Breakfast – choose from....

- 1 cup of high fibre *breakfast cereal* with *low fat milk*.

OR

- 2 slices of *bread* or *toast*, preferably *wholegrain*, *wholemeal* or *high fibre white* – with **thinly spread** margarine, peanut butter, jam, Vegemite® or try with *baked beans*, grilled tomato, or sardines.

PLUS

- 1 piece of *fruit*.
- Tea, coffee or water.

Light meal – choose from....

- Soup (if desired, preferably containing vegetables and legumes).
- 1 sandwich made with 2 slices of *bread*, or 1 *bread roll*, 4 dry *biscuits* – preferably wholegrain or wholemeal – with **thinly spread** margarine.
- Salad vegetables.
- A small serve of lean meat, skinless poultry, seafood, egg, fat reduced cheese or a more generous serve of *legumes* (such as *beans* or *lentils*).
- 1 piece of *fruit*.
- Water, tea or coffee.

Main meal – choose from....

- 1 *bread roll* OR 2 slices of *bread* – preferably *wholegrain* or *wholemeal* OR 1 cup of cooked *pasta* or *rice* OR 1 medium *potato* or *sweet potato*.
- Other vegetables (include freely).
- A small serve of lean meat, skinless poultry, seafood, egg, fat reduced cheese or a more generous serve of *legumes* (such as *beans* or *lentils*).
- 1 piece of *fruit* or small amount of *low fat milk pudding* or *yoghurt*.
- Water, tea or coffee.

You can eat your main meal at lunch or dinner – whichever you prefer.

Food choices for people with diabetes continued

Between-meal snacks

If you are taking insulin or diabetes tablets, ask your dietitian or diabetes educator whether you need to have between-meal snacks. These could include 1 piece of *fruit*, 1 slice of wholegrain *bread*, 1 slice of fruit *bread*, 2 high fibre *biscuits*, 1 tub of low fat *milk* or *yoghurt*.

Diabetes Australia recommends that everyone with diabetes visit a dietitian for personal advice.

For more information

The menu plan on page 7 is a guide only. For more personalised information, an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) will help. To find a dietitian in your area, contact:

- The Dietitians Association of Australia on 1800 812 942 or
- Diabetes Australia on 1300 136 588.

Dietitians are based in many local hospitals, diabetes centres and community health centres and are also listed in the telephone directory.

Remember – good food and regular activity will help to keep you healthy!

Would you like to join Australia's leading diabetes organisation?

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For more information phone 1300 136 588

Website: www.diabetesaustralia.com.au

Multilingual information: www.multilingualdiabetes.org.au

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