



# The Way to Eat with Diabetes

Eating well with diabetes doesn't mean that you can't eat your favorite foods, but it does mean that you should monitor your eating habits. Since blood sugar control is the primary goal of diabetes management, you will find that some foods are better at helping you reach that goal than others. Balance your plate to keep blood sugar fluctuations at bay.

## **What are "slow" carbohydrates?**

Slow carbohydrates are high-fiber, whole foods like fruits, non-starchy vegetables (i.e., broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, bell peppers, snap peas, cucumbers, kale, collard greens, etc.), whole grains, beans, legumes, dried peas, and lentils. These foods allow the gradual release of insulin and lead to smaller elevations in blood sugar. This combination is vital because it gives your body a chance to put sugar into the cells that use it for energy.

## **What are "fast" carbohydrates?**

Fast carbohydrates are refined foods like cookies, candy, cakes, muffins, white bread, white rice, and egg noodles. They are typically low-fiber and high-sugar. They spike blood sugar immediately, which allows it to stay up longer, then seriously drops it. This creates highs and lows in blood sugar, which in turn leaves you feeling tired and drained of energy. Plus, these foods make your pancreas work harder because they require more insulin to cover the higher blood sugar levels. Over time, this can wear out the pancreas, which leaves you needing more medication or insulin shots.

## **Why eat regular, balanced meals?**

The timing of meals and snacks is very important. Eating consistently throughout the day is vital for blood sugar control. Set a daily eating schedule and stick to it! Space meals and snacks 3-4 hours apart, and make sure to balance your carbohydrates with a bit of protein (like almonds, walnuts, peanuts, chicken, fish, or low-fat cheese), plus some healthful fats (like olive oil, canola oil, flax seeds, or avocado).

## **Why should I measure my portions?**

Knowing exactly what you're eating is key to diabetes management. Aim for 2-4 servings of carbohydrates with meals and 1-2 servings of carbohydrates with snacks. A single serving of carbohydrates is equal to ½ cup cooked pasta or brown rice, a piece of whole fruit, one cup of low-fat milk or yogurt, or 1 slice of whole bread. Have about 4 ounces of protein with meals. A 4-ounce serving is about the size of the palm of your hand. Try lean meat chicken, fish, or a whole egg. Add a serving of healthful fats too. One ounce of nuts (i.e., pistachios, almonds, walnuts, peanuts), 1 Tbsp. of peanut or almond butter, 1 Tbsp. of olive or canola oil, or 2 Tbsp. of avocado are all good choices.

## **What are empty calories?**

Empty calories don't supply nutritional value. Steer clear of alcohol, sweets, saturated fat, and trans fat. If you drink alcohol, stick with 1 drink per day for women and 2 drinks per day for men. Eat 1-2 servings of carbohydrates and 1-2 ounces of protein while imbibing. Limit sweets to 1 small cookie or 1 small piece of cake or candy as a treat. Avoid trans fats or partially hydrogenated oils and limit saturated fats from foods like beef, bacon, dark meat or poultry, butter, whole milk, and full-fat cheese.

## **What are the diabetes superfoods?**

The American Diabetes Association (ADA) has compiled a list of "superfoods", which are perfect for diabetes management. Many are affordable options, and if you get seasonal or frozen fruits and veggies as well as canned fish, you can further reduce the price tag. Here are a few of the superfoods, and you can find the rest on their website:

- Dark green, leafy vegetables
- Whole grains
- Salmon and high Omega-3 fish
- Citrus fruits
- Nuts
- Fat-free milk and yogurt

## **Where can I find more information?**

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)

Dietary Guidelines for Americans: [www.dietaryguidelines.gov](http://www.dietaryguidelines.gov)

American Diabetes Association: [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org)

Food and Health Communications for recipes: <http://foodandhealth.com>

MyPlate: [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov)

Created by Victoria Shanta Retelny, RD, LDN, author of *The Essential Guide to Healthy Healing Foods*

Source: Food and Health Communications [www.foodandhealth.com](http://www.foodandhealth.com)

[www.commonhealth.virginia.gov](http://www.commonhealth.virginia.gov)

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