

Living with Diabetes: What's There to Eat?

General goals

The goals of nutritional medical therapy for diabetes are to bring blood glucose levels as close as possible to the normal levels of cholesterol and triglycerides. These goals can be achieved by choosing better foods and by being more active.

When your blood sugar level goes down, you are not only delaying or preventing the complications of diabetes, you will also feel better.

Carbohydrates

Starches, sugar and fiber are the carbohydrates contained in food. Starches and sugar raise blood sugar; fibers don't. To control your blood sugar level:

- ▶ Eat more foods rich in fiber. For example, whole grain breads and cereals, dried beans and peas, vegetables and fruits.
- ▶ Eat less processed foods.
- ▶ Eat fat-free foods.
- ▶ Limit juices to 4 ounces or less.

You have to measure your blood sugar to see how certain foods affect you in particular. It's common for people with diabetes to also have high blood pressure. If you eat less salt, it may help lower your blood pressure.

Fat and cholesterol

The amount of fat you consume depends on the calories you consume and on your cholesterol and triglyceride levels. You should average 300 milligrams of cholesterol or less per day.

- ▶ Eat fat-free or low-fat dairy products.
- ▶ Eat servings of meat, fish or chicken of 3 ounces or less.
- ▶ Eat small portions of soft margarine and oil instead of margarine in stick form, vegetable shortening, butter, lard or bacon.
- ▶ Eat small portions of unsalted nuts.
- ▶ Don't eat too many fried foods.

Proteins

Too much protein can speed up kidney disease. Proteins from plants may be better for you than proteins from animals. Make portions of meat, fish or poultry go farther by mixing them with beans, peas, vegetables, fruits, grains, tofu and other soy products.



Vitamins and minerals

- ▶ Use little salt on your food.
- ▶ Read nutrition labels and buy only low-sodium foods.
- ▶ Eat more fresh foods and less restaurant or processed foods.
- ▶ Season your food with lemon juice, herbs and spices.

Eat more fruits and vegetables to ensure a high amount of potassium and antioxidants. Talk to your doctor or nutritionist before supplementing your diet with vitamins or minerals; a high dose may be harmful to your health.

Calories

If you are overweight, you may want to lose some of the weight to improve your blood sugar levels. Check with a dietitian to find out what calorie level is best for you. Do not try to follow fasting or trendy diets. It is better to lose weight slowly, and it may even be worth it to join a weight-control group.

Artificial sugars

It would seem that the artificial sugars that are available nowadays do not pose any danger.

- ▶ Acidic ingredients often reduce bitter aftertaste.
- ▶ Aspartame tends to lose its sweetness when heated.
- ▶ The more saccharin or acesulfame K used in place of natural sugar, the less it is needed.

Alcohol

If you drink alcohol, have only one alcoholic beverage per day, or at most two. Consult your doctor before drinking alcohol. An alcoholic drink means:

- ▶ 12 ounces of light beer
- ▶ 4 ounces of dry wine
- ▶ 1.5 ounces of hard liquor

Alcohol can increase the risk of hypoglycemia, i.e., very low blood sugar. To avoid the problems associated with hypoglycemia:

- ▶ Never drink alcohol without eating something at the same time.
- ▶ Always carry visible medical identification indicating that you have diabetes.
- ▶ Don't drink alone. Do it with someone who knows about your diabetes and who knows what to do if you have a low-sugar reaction.

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