

Diabetes



Get the Nutrition Facts

You've probably heard it before: eat your fruits and veggies, drink plenty of water, avoid junk foods. But did you know nutrition involves so much more than just getting in 3 square meals per day? Following a healthy diet gives you energy to do all of your favorite activities. A well-rounded, balanced diet can be challenging to follow when you have diabetes, but careful planning and a bit of knowledge can help you make nutritious choices for a healthy lifestyle that can manage your diabetes.

The Basics Behind Diabetes

Insulin, blood sugar, glycemia: oh my! Diabetes is a disorder of the metabolism, which affects how the pancreas makes insulin to regulate the amount of sugar, or glucose, in your blood. As the body digests carbohydrates and releases nutrients into the bloodstream after eating, insulin helps move glucose into the body's cells for energy. With diabetes, however, the body either does not use or make

enough insulin, affecting how you function on a day-to-day basis.

There are 3 types of diabetes:

- *Type 1*, in which the immune system attacks and destroys the pancreas's cells that make insulin. This type must be treated with an additional insulin prescription.
- *Type 2*, in which the body creates an insulin resistance and cannot make enough insulin to keep a normal blood sugar level. It can be treated effectively with healthy behavior changes, including diet, exercise, and medication. Type 2 is the most common form of diabetes.
- *Gestational*, which only develops during pregnancy. Most women return to more normal blood glucose levels after giving birth, but they should be monitored afterwards because they are at higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes later in life.

The American Diabetes Association (ADA) estimates that over 30 million Americans live with diabetes. If not monitored and treated properly, diabetes can have serious complications, including:

- Neuropathy
- Stroke
- Kidney disease
- Skin infections
- High blood pressure
- Glaucoma

Keys to Living With Diabetes

- **Consult with a registered dietitian (RD).** The RD will help you put together a personalized “diabetes diet” based on your tastes and health goals.
- **Eat at a regular time each day.** Following a schedule can help keep your blood sugar at a more stable level from day to day to avoid serious complications. Be sure not to skip any meals either!
- **Be aware of the portion sizes of what you eat.** Read more on the other side of this handout about eating a balanced diet.
- **Keep an eye on your feet, from your toes to your heel.** Proper fitting footwear can help prevent cuts, cracks, and sores in your feet that can turn into ulcers. Keep your foot moisturized and dry.
- **Add exercise into your everyday routine.** Increased physical activity can lower glucose, blood pressure and cholesterol; burn calories for weight management; strengthen the heart, muscles, and bones; and improve mood, sleep, and energy level.
- **Monitor your blood sugar levels closely.** Check your glucose daily and keep it under control as directed by your PCP. Typical goals for blood sugar levels include 80-130mg/dL before eating and 140-160mg/dL two hours after eating.



The ‘Dreaded’ Carbohydrate

People with diabetes should pay close attention to the amount of carbohydrates (carbs) they consume daily. Carbohydrates are a macronutrient and include fiber, starches, and sugars, which are broken down during digestion and used for energy stores. Counting how many carbs you consume per day, from fruits and grains but also juice and alcohol, can help manage your blood sugar levels.

Everyone has a different amount of carbs they can eat; a RD can help you determine how many carbohydrate servings are a good daily goal for you. Generally, 1 serving of carbohydrates is 15 grams, which is equivalent to:

- A small piece of fruit
- 1 slice of bread
- 1/3 cup of cooked pasta or rice
- 1/4 of a large baked potato
- 2/3 cup of nonfat yogurt

A Well-Balanced Plate

When you were younger, you may have seen a food wheel or pyramid graphic with serving size suggestions for each food group. In 2011, the United States Department of Agriculture updated its dietary guidelines with MyPlate, a more individualized approach to a well-rounded, healthy diet. The concept is simple:

- Divide your plate into 2 halves. Split one of those halves again, so that there are 2 quarters on one side and 1 half on the other.
- Fill the largest section (the half) with non-starchy vegetables like a salad, cauliflower, spinach, or peppers.
- Add a grain or starchy vegetable to 1 quarter. Starchy vegetables include potatoes, green peas and corn, and grains include pasta, rice and tortillas.
- In the other quarter, place some protein: fish, poultry, eggs, beans, and nuts are all great options.
- Finally, add a serving of fruit (e.g., berries or apple) or dairy (e.g., cheese or yogurt) as a side.

It's easy to take the "MyPlate" concept and use it for grocery shopping as well. Half of your grocery list should be filled with non-starchy vegetables, while the other half is lean proteins, whole grains, fruit, dairy, and starchy vegetables. Typically, grocery stores put the healthiest options (fruits, veggies, meat/fish, and dairy) on the outside aisles. Stick to these aisles as you fill your cart or basket.

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