

# Learning About Diabetes Food Guidelines

## Your Care Instructions

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Meal planning is important to manage diabetes. It helps keep your blood sugar at a target level (which you set with your doctor). You don't have to eat special foods. You can eat what your family eats, including sweets once in a while. But you do have to pay attention to how often you eat and how much you eat of certain foods.

You may want to work with a dietitian or a certified diabetes educator (CDE) to help you plan meals and snacks. A dietitian or CDE can also help you lose weight if that is one of your goals.

## What should you know about eating carbs?

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Managing the amount of carbohydrate (carbs) you eat is an important part of healthy meals when you have diabetes. Carbohydrate is found in many foods.

- Learn which foods have carbs. And learn the amounts of carbs in different foods.
  - Bread, cereal, pasta, and rice have about 15 grams of carbs in a serving. A serving is 1 slice of bread (1 ounce), ½ cup of cooked cereal, or 1/3 cup of cooked pasta or rice.
  - Fruits have 15 grams of carbs in a serving. A serving is 1 small fresh fruit, such as an apple or orange; ½ of a banana; ½ cup of cooked or canned fruit; ½ cup of fruit juice; 1 cup of melon or raspberries; or 2 tablespoons of dried fruit.
  - Milk and no-sugar-added yogurt have 15 grams of carbs in a serving. A serving is 1 cup of milk or 2/3 cup of no-sugar-added yogurt.
  - Starchy vegetables have 15 grams of carbs in a serving. A serving is ½ cup of mashed potatoes or sweet potato; 1 cup winter squash; ½ of a small baked potato; ½ cup of cooked beans; or ½ cup cooked corn or green peas.
- Learn how much carbs to eat each day and at each meal. A dietitian or CDE can teach you how to keep track of the amount of carbs you eat. This is called carbohydrate counting.
- If you are not sure how to count carbohydrate grams, use the Plate Method to plan meals. It is a good, quick way to make sure that you have a balanced meal. It also helps you spread carbs throughout the day.
  - Divide your plate by types of foods. Put non-starchy vegetables on half the plate, meat or other protein food on one-quarter of the plate, and a grain or starchy vegetable in the final quarter of the plate. To this you can add a small piece of fruit and 1 cup of milk or yogurt, depending on how many carbs you are supposed to eat at a meal.
- Try to eat about the same amount of carbs at each meal. Do not "save up" your daily allowance of carbs to eat at one meal.
- Proteins have very little or no carbs per serving. Examples of proteins are beef, chicken, turkey, fish, eggs, tofu, cheese, cottage cheese, and peanut butter. A serving size of meat is 3 ounces, which is about the size of a deck of cards. Examples of meat substitute serving sizes (equal to 1 ounce of meat) are 1/4 cup of cottage cheese, 1 egg, 1 tablespoon of peanut butter, and ½ cup of tofu.

## How can you eat out and still eat healthy?

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- Learn to estimate the serving sizes of foods that have carbohydrate. If you measure food at home, it will be easier to estimate the amount in a serving of restaurant food.
- If the meal you order has too much carbohydrate (such as potatoes, corn, or baked beans), ask to have a low-carbohydrate food instead. Ask for a salad or green vegetables.
- If you use insulin, check your blood sugar before and after eating out to help you plan how much to eat in the future.
- If you eat more carbohydrate at a meal than you had planned, take a walk or do other exercise. This will help lower your blood sugar.

## What else should you know?

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- Limit saturated fat, such as the fat from meat and dairy products. This is a healthy choice because people who have diabetes are at higher risk of heart disease. So choose lean cuts of meat and nonfat or low-fat dairy products. Use olive or canola oil instead of butter or shortening when cooking.
- Don't skip meals. Your blood sugar may drop too low if you skip meals and take insulin or certain medicines for diabetes.
- Check with your doctor before you drink alcohol. Alcohol can cause your blood sugar to drop too low. Alcohol can also cause a bad reaction if you take certain diabetes medicines.

**Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety.** Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.



### Where can you learn more?

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Go to <http://www.healthwise.net/ed>

Enter **I147** in the search box to learn more about "**Learning About Diabetes Food Guidelines**".

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