



Patient Information

Diabetes and Meal Planning

Healthy eating is beneficial for everyone, but it is especially important for people with diabetes. That's because the type and amounts of food eaten can have an impact on blood glucose (blood sugar). If you carefully choose what and when you eat, you can help maintain healthy blood glucose levels and reduce your risk of long-term complications from diabetes.

Have a Plan

The right diabetes meal plan can guide you on how much and what kinds of food to eat. Following a meal plan will help improve your blood glucose, blood pressure and cholesterol numbers. People with diabetes have to take extra care to make sure that food intake is balanced with insulin, oral medications and exercise to help manage blood glucose levels. Your nurse practitioner or dietitian can help you create a meal plan that is best for you.

Guidelines

The American Diabetes Association has published nutrition recommendations based on specific medical conditions.

For people who are at risk for diabetes:

- Eat fiber-rich foods (14 grams of fiber for every 1,000 calories). Whole grains should make up half of all grain intake.
- Achieve and maintain a healthy body weight. Lose weight if necessary. Medications may be useful for some people, but they must be combined with lifestyle changes. For very obese people, weight loss surgery might be appropriate.
- Exercise. This is important even if you don't need to lose weight. Exercise helps lower blood glucose levels, increase insulin sensitivity and improve cardiovascular risk

For people who already have diabetes:

- Obtain carbohydrates from fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes and low-fat or skim milk.
- Eat plenty of fiber-rich foods.
- Keep saturated fats to less than 7% of total caloric intake per day.
- Eat at least two servings of nonfried fish each week.
- Limit your intake of trans fats.
- Restrict cholesterol intake to less than 200 mg per day.
- Eat smaller portions.
- Choose nonfat or low-fat dairy products.

- Eat only lean meats.
- Remove the skin from chicken and other poultry.
- Eat at least five servings of vegetables and fruits every day.
- Split entrees and desserts with others when eating out.
- Ask for dressings, sour cream and sauces on the side.

Healthy recipes can be found on the American Diabetes Association's Virtual Grocery Store Web site: <http://vgs.diabetes.org>.

Carbohydrates

Counting carbohydrates is an important element of meal planning and keeping your blood glucose on target. Examples of carbohydrate foods are bread, crackers, cereal, pasta, rice, corn, sweet potatoes, beans, fruit, milk, yogurt, sugary sweets and popcorn. If you eat more of those foods than you should, your blood glucose level is likely to be higher than usual several hours afterward.

Ask your NP to determine what your recommended number of carbohydrate servings is based on your weight, activity level, diabetes medications and blood glucose goal. For many people, having three or four servings of carbohydrate foods at each meal and one or two servings for snacks works well. One carbohydrate serving is equal to 15 grams of carbohydrate: Pay attention to the "total carbohydrate" listing on nutrition labels.

Food Labels

Reading labels can help you make wise food choices. Most packaged foods list nutrition information in a section called Nutrition Facts. There you'll find the serving size and the amount of nutrients per serving.

When looking at the label, first ask yourself how the serving size compares with your usual serving. If the serving size listed on the cereal box is 1 cup, but you usually eat 2 cups, be sure to double all of the numbers in the nutrition facts section.

To make heart-healthy food choices, compare labels of similar foods. Choose the product with a smaller amount of saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium. Select foods with more fiber.

Keep in mind that fat-free foods can be higher in carbohydrate and contain almost the same calories as the foods they replace — for example, fat-free cookies are not necessarily a better choice than the standard product, so read your labels carefully. ❖

Additional Notes:
