

Diabetes Mellitus and Food

It is important for you to manage your blood sugar (*glucose*) level. Your blood glucose level can be greatly affected by what you eat. Eating healthier foods in the appropriate amounts throughout the day at about the same time each day will help you control your blood glucose level. It can also help slow or prevent worsening of your diabetes mellitus. Healthy eating may even help you improve the level of your blood pressure and reach or maintain a healthy weight.

General recommendations for healthful eating and cooking habits include:

- Eating meals and snacks regularly. Avoid going long periods of time without eating to lose weight.
- Eating a diet that consists mainly of plant-based foods, such as fruits, vegetables, nuts, legumes, and whole grains.
- Using low-heat cooking methods, such as baking, instead of high-heat cooking methods, such as deep frying.

Work with your dietitian to make sure you understand how to use the Nutrition Facts information on food labels.

HOW CAN FOOD AFFECT ME?

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates affect your blood glucose level more than any other type of food. Your dietitian will help you determine how many carbohydrates to eat at each meal and teach you how to count carbohydrates. Counting carbohydrates is important to keep your blood glucose at a healthy level, especially if you are using insulin or taking certain medicines for diabetes mellitus.

Alcohol

Alcohol can cause sudden decreases in blood glucose (*hypoglycemia*), especially if you use insulin or take certain medicines for diabetes mellitus. Hypoglycemia can be a life-threatening condition. Symptoms of hypoglycemia (sleepiness, dizziness, and disorientation) are similar to symptoms of having too much alcohol.

If your health care provider has given you approval to drink alcohol, do so in moderation and use the following guidelines:

- Women should not have more than one drink per day, and men should not have more than two drinks per day. One drink is equal to:
 - 12 oz of beer.
 - 5 oz of wine.
 - 1½ oz of hard liquor.
- Do not drink on an empty stomach.
- Keep yourself hydrated. Have water, diet soda, or unsweetened iced tea.
- Regular soda, juice, and other mixers might contain a lot of carbohydrates and should be counted.

WHAT FOODS ARE NOT RECOMMENDED?

As you make food choices, it is important to remember that all foods are not the same. Some foods have fewer nutrients per serving than other foods, even though they might have the same number of calories or carbohydrates. It is difficult to get your body what it needs when you eat foods with fewer nutrients. Examples of foods that you should avoid that are high in calories and carbohydrates but low in nutrients include:

- *Trans* fats (most processed foods list *trans* fats on the Nutrition Facts label).
- Regular soda.
- Juice.
- Candy.
- Sweets, such as cake, pie, doughnuts, and cookies.
- Fried foods.

WHAT FOODS CAN I EAT?

Eat nutrient-rich foods, which will nourish your body and keep you healthy. The food you should eat also will depend on several factors, including:

- The calories you need.
- The medicines you take.
- Your weight.
- Your blood glucose level.
- Your blood pressure level.
- Your cholesterol level.

You should eat a variety of foods, including:

- Protein.
 - Lean cuts of meat.
 - Proteins low in saturated fats, such as fish, egg whites, and beans. Avoid processed meats.
- Fruits and vegetables.
 - Fruits and vegetables that may help control blood glucose levels, such as apples, mangoes, and yams.
- Dairy products.
 - Choose fat-free or low-fat dairy products, such as milk, yogurt, and cheese.
- Grains, bread, pasta, and rice.
 - Choose whole grain products, such as multigrain bread, whole oats, and brown rice. These foods may help control blood pressure.
- Fats.
 - Foods containing healthful fats, such as nuts, avocado, olive oil, canola oil, and fish.

DOES EVERYONE WITH DIABETES MELLITUS HAVE THE SAME MEAL PLAN?

Because every person with diabetes mellitus is different, there is not one meal plan that works for everyone. It is very important that you meet with a dietitian who will help you create a meal plan that is just right for you.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.

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