

Diabetes: healthy diet for diabetics

Diet is the key to controlling both type 1 and type 2 diabetes.

A proper diet for people with diabetes is based on a healthy eating plan that applies to all people. There is no need to prepare separate meals or buy special foods.

The basis of the diet is reduction in total energy from fat and sugar and having a high-fibre complex carbohydrate diet of foods such as wholemeal bread, rolled oats, pasta, beans, lentils, apples and low-sugar breakfast cereals.

Meals should be eaten at regular times and spread throughout the day. It is good to be advised by a diabetic nurse educator or dietician.

Simple healthy guidelines

- Limit sugar in your diet.
- Limit fat.
- Limit alcohol.
- Drink lots of water.
- Reduce salt in cooking and on food.
- Eat a variety of fruit, vegetables, cereals and bread.
- Eat fish regularly.
- Eat a high-fibre diet.

Objectives

- Achieve an ideal weight through diet and exercise (most important).
- Maintain a diet low in fat and sugar and high in fibre and complex carbohydrates.
- Aim to eat a complex carbohydrate at each meal.
- Keep the fasting blood sugar below 6 mmol/L.

Fat in the diet

People generally eat too much fat and it should be reduced. Common sources of fats and oils are:

- high-fat dairy products
- high-fat meats
- fats added to cooking
- snack and takeaway foods
- processed sausages and smallgoods.

Carbohydrates and the glycaemic index (GI)

Carbohydrates are good for people with diabetes as they provide a ready source of essential glucose in the blood stream. However, different carbohydrates affect blood glucose levels differently.

It is best to prevent your blood glucose level from swinging too high or too low. The 'best choice' carbohydrates are those that cause the smallest rise in blood glucose levels because they are digested slowly and released slowly. As a general rule the slow-acting carbohydrates that are rich in fibre—the complex carbohydrates—are best. These are called *low glycaemic index* or *low-GI* foods, ('glycaemic' is a term for blood glucose).

The glycaemic index is related to a standard of 100 represented by taking 50 grams of glucose. It has a scale of 1 to 100. High-GI foods are those above 70. Low-GI foods are those below 55.

It is good to have at least one low-GI food at each meal.

Examples of low-GI foods

- *Cereals*: Porridge, oat bran, Special K™, muesli, All-Bran™.
- *Breads*: Wholegrain, fruit loaf, sourdough, raisin bread, pumpernickel.
- *Fruit*: All fresh fruit especially apples, firm bananas, oranges, stone fruit, grapes, canned fruit in natural juice.
- *Vegetables*: All fresh, frozen and canned vegetables.
- *Dairy*: Milk (especially skim, low-fat), yoghurt, low-fat cheese (e.g. cottage).
- *Starchy foods*: Sweetcorn, lentils, pasta, noodles, basmati rice, brown rice, sweet potato, dried beans and baked beans.
- *Snacks*: Prunes, dried apricots, nuts, Vita Weat™ biscuits, Snack Right™ biscuits, peanuts, dark chocolate.

Examples of high-GI foods

- *Cereals*: Cornflakes™, Rice Bubbles™, Coco Pops™, Nutrigrain™.
- *Breads*: White, wholemeal, crumpets, scones, bagels, French bread.
- *Fruits*: Watermelon, dates, ripe bananas.
- *Dairy*: Cream, butter, ice-cream, cheese.
- *Starchy foods*: Potato (including baked, mashed, boiled and chips), regular rice, Calrose and Jasmine rice.
- *Snacks*: Pretzels, Twisties™, glucose lollies, most biscuits, water crackers, rice cakes, raisins, corn chips, cordials.

Other general advice

- Use low-fat cooking methods.
- Use low-fat spreads (e.g. light margarine, ricotta or cottage cheese).
- Use low-fat cuts of meat and poultry without the skin.
- As a rule avoid foods that contain large amounts of added sugar, for example sweets, cakes, sweet biscuits, chocolates, soft drinks, jellies and desserts (can be eaten occasionally).
- Discuss a personalised meal plan with your dietician or doctor.
- The GI of common foods can be found at the website www.glycemicindex.com