

# A Healthy Type 2 Diabetes Diet

Maintaining a healthy diet is important for everyone, but it is especially important for people with diabetes. A type 2 diabetes diet and following the right meal plan can make all the difference to a person struggling to keep their blood sugar under control. But, what is the right meal plan? How much of which food group should you eat?

Along with a visit to a dietician, this guide should help answer questions you may have about diabetes and nutrition.

## Carbohydrates and Fiber in a Type 2 Diabetes Diet

Carbohydrates are one of the major food categories (the others include proteins and fats) in a type 2 diabetes diet. They provide fuel for the body in the form of glucose. Glucose is a sugar that is the primary means of energy for all of the body's cells.

There are two ways to classify carbohydrates -- simple and complex. Simple carbohydrates are sugars -- like glucose, sucrose, lactose, and fructose. They are found in refined sugar and in fruits. Complex carbohydrates are the starches, which are the simple sugars bonded together chemically -- they are found in beans, nuts, vegetables, and whole grains. Complex carbohydrates are considered healthier mostly because they are digested by the body slowly, providing a steady source of energy. They also contain valuable amounts of fiber.

Carbohydrates, rather than fats or proteins, have the most immediate effect on your blood sugar since carbohydrates are broken down directly into sugar early during digestion. It is important to eat the suggested amount of carbohydrate at each meal, along with some protein and fat.

Carbohydrates are mainly found in the following food groups:

- Fruit
- Milk and yogurt
- Bread, cereal, rice, pasta
- Starchy vegetables like potatoes

## What Is Carbohydrate Counting?

Carbohydrate counting is a method of meal planning that is a simple way to keep track of the amount of total carbohydrates you eat each day. It helps allow you to eat what you want. Counting grams of carbohydrate and evenly distributing them at meals will help you control your blood sugar.

Instead of following an exchange list, with carbohydrate counting you monitor how much carbohydrates (sugar and starch) you eat daily. One carbohydrate serving is equal to 15 grams of carbohydrates.

With carbohydrate counting, you plan your carbohydrate intake based on what your pre-meal sugar is and your intake or insulin dose can be adjusted. Carbohydrate counting can be used by anyone and not just by people with diabetes that are taking insulin. If you eat more carbohydrates than your insulin supply can handle, your blood sugar level goes up. If you eat too little, your blood sugar level may fall too low. These fluctuations can be managed by knowing how to count your carbohydrate intake.

A registered dietitian will help you figure out a carbohydrate counting plan that meets your specific needs. For adults, a typical plan generally includes three to four carbohydrates at each meal, and one to two carbohydrate servings as snacks.

With carbohydrate counting, you can pick almost any food product off the shelf, read the label, and use the information about grams of carbohydrates to fit the food into your type 2 diabetes meal plan.

Carbohydrate counting is most useful for people who take multiple daily injections of insulin, use the insulin pump, or who want more flexibility and variety in their food choices. However, it may not be for everyone, and the traditional method of following food exchange lists may be used instead.

### **How Much Fiber Should I Eat?**

Fiber is the indigestible part of plant foods. It plays an important role in the digestive process as it helps move foods along the digestive tract, adding bulk to stool to help it pass through the bowel. In addition, diets high in fiber are associated with lower risks of obesity, high blood pressure, heart disease, and strokes.

- Delays sugar absorption, helping to better control blood sugar levels.
- Binds with cholesterol and may reduce the level of 'bad' LDL cholesterol in the blood.
- Is a good source of vitamins and minerals.
- Helps prevent constipation and reduces the risk of certain intestinal disorders.
- Promotes weight loss by helping to decrease caloric intake. (It adds bulk to the food we eat, making you feel fuller.)

The goal for all diabetics is to consume 20 to 30 grams of fiber per day. The best way to increase fiber intake as part of your type 2 diabetes diet is to eat more of these fiber-rich foods:

- Fresh fruits and vegetables
- Cooked dried beans and peas
- Whole grain breads, cereals, and crackers
- Brown rice
- Bran products

### **Fat in a Type 2 Diabetes Diet**

Since diabetes increases your risk of developing heart disease, eating foods lower in fat -- especially saturated fat -- is particularly important to keep that risk as low as possible. In addition, limiting calories from fat can help you lose any extra weight, especially when combined with an exercise program.

The major contributors of saturated fats in our diet come from cheese, beef, milk, and baked items. Trans fats also contribute to the increase risk of heart disease. These fats are vegetable oils that are harder; we recognize these as solid oils. Many of these are used in baking and frying.

Here are some general guidelines for selecting and preparing low-fat foods for your type 2 diabetes diet:

- Select lean meats including poultry, fish, and lean red meats. When preparing these foods, don't fry them. Instead, you can bake, broil, grill, roast, or boil.
- Select low-fat dairy products such as low-fat cheese, skim milk, and products made from skim milk such as nonfat yogurt, nonfat frozen yogurt, evaporated skim milk, and buttermilk. Remember to include dairy products in your daily carbohydrate count.
- Use low-fat vegetable cooking spray when preparing foods or consider using cholesterol lowering margarine containing stanols or sterols. Examples include "Take Control" and "Benecol."
- Use liquid vegetable oils that contain poly- or monounsaturated fats which can help lower your 'bad' LDL cholesterol.
- Select lower fat margarines, gravies, and salad dressings and remember to watch the carbohydrate count on condiments and dressings.
- All fruits and vegetables are good low-fat choices. Remember to include fruit and starchy vegetables in your daily carbohydrate count.

A registered dietitian can provide more information on how to prepare and select low-fat foods.

## **Salt in a Type 2 Diabetes Diet**

Diabetes increases your risk for high blood pressure. High levels of salt (sodium) in your diet can further increase that risk. Your health care provider or dietitian may ask you to limit or avoid these high-salt foods:

- Salt and seasoned salt (or salt seasonings)
- Boxed mixes of potatoes, rice, or pasta
- Canned meats
- Canned soups and vegetables (with salt)
- Cured or processed foods
- Ketchup, mustard, salad dressings, other spreads and canned sauces
- Packaged soups, gravies, or sauces
- Pickled foods
- Processed meats: lunch meat, sausage, bacon, and ham
- Olives
- Salty snack foods

- Monosodium glutamate or MSG
- Soy and steak sauces

## Low-Salt Cooking Tips

- Use fresh ingredients and/or foods with no salt added.
- For favorite recipes, you may need to use other ingredients and eliminate or decrease the salt you would normally add.
- Try orange or pineapple juice as a base for meat marinades.
- Avoid convenience foods such as canned soups, entrées, and vegetables; pasta and rice mixes; frozen dinners; instant cereal; and pudding, gravy, and sauce mixes.
- Select frozen entrées that contain 600 milligrams or less of salt. However, limit yourself to one of these frozen entrées per day. Check the Nutrition Facts label on the package for sodium content.
- Use fresh, frozen, no-added-salt canned vegetables, or canned vegetables that have been rinsed before they are prepared.
- Low-salt canned soups may be used.
- Avoid mixed seasonings and spice blends that include salt, such as garlic salt.

## What Seasonings Can Replace Salt?

Herbs and spices are the answer to improving the natural flavors in food without using salt. Below are some mixtures to use for meats, poultry, fish, vegetables, soups, and salads.

### Spicy Blend

2 tablespoons dried savory, crumbled  
 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground white pepper  
 1 tablespoon dry mustard  
 1/4 teaspoon ground cumin  
 2 1/2 teaspoons onion powder  
 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder  
 1/4 teaspoon curry powder

### Saltless Surprise

2 teaspoons garlic powder  
 1 teaspoon basil  
 1 teaspoon oregano  
 1 teaspoon powdered lemon rind or dehydrated lemon juice

### Herb Seasoning

2 tablespoons dried dill weed or basil leaves, crumbled  
 1 teaspoon celery seed  
 2 tablespoons onion powder  
 1/4 teaspoon dried oregano leaves, crumbled  
 A pinch of freshly ground pepper

**Spicy Seasoning**

1 teaspoon cloves

1 teaspoon pepper

2 teaspoons paprika

1 teaspoon coriander seed (crushed)

1 tablespoon rosemary

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