

Best and Worst Foods for Diabetes

You're ready to head off to the grocery store and looking for your list. If you've got [diabetes](#), though, you need more than a traditional shopping list. You need a guide that will let you quickly determine whether a food is a good choice or a bad one. Making the best choices will help you maintain good health and control your blood sugar levels, keeping them as close to normal as possible. WebMD has compiled a list of best and worst food choices for diabetes that you can use either in the super market or in your own kitchen when you want something to eat.

The categories for the food choice list are taken from the diabetes [food pyramid](#). They include six food groups. The pyramid starts with breads, grains, and other starches at the base and rises to fats, oils, and sweets at the top. Here's the full list of categories from bottom up:

- Breads, grains, and other starches
- Vegetables
- Fruits
- Meat, meat substitutes, and other protein
- Dairy
- Fats, oils, and sweets

Your goal for shopping and preparing meals is to choose more food from the base of the pyramid and less as you move toward the top.

What follows are some of the best and worst choices that can be made from each group. In addition, you'll find tips for making the best beverage choices. Keep in mind, though, if a food falls in the worst group, that doesn't mean you should never eat it. You can think of it as an occasional treat. But in general, it will be easier to manage your diabetes if you choose most of your foods from the best lists.

Breads, Grains, and Diabetes

Along with essential vitamins, minerals, and fiber, foods in this first category contain mostly complex carbohydrates that your body turns into sugar for energy. Even though carbs make glucose levels rise, complex carbs are absorbed more slowly than simple carbs, and you need carbs for energy. Use this list as a guide to help you choose the complex carbs that are best for you.

Best Choices	Worst Choices
Whole-grain flours, such as whole wheat flour	White flour
Whole grains, such as brown rice	Processed grains, such as white rice
Cereals containing whole-grain ingredients and little added sugar	Cereals with little whole grain and lots of sugar
Whole-grain bread	White bread
Baked potato or baked steak fries	French fries
Whole-grain flour or corn tortillas	Fried white-flour tortillas

Diabetes and Vegetables

Vegetables contain carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals. They usually contain fewer carbs than fruits. Many vegetables contain fiber and are naturally low in fat and sodium (unless they are canned). Starchy vegetables, such as potatoes and corn, aren't included in this category. They are considered part of the breads, grains, and other starches group. Use this list to guide your shopping and cooking choices.

Best Choices	Worst Choices
Fresh vegetables, eaten raw or lightly steamed, roasted, or grilled	Canned vegetables with lots of added sodium
Frozen vegetables, lightly steamed	Vegetables cooked with lots of added butter, cheese, or sauce
Fresh cucumbers	Pickles (only if you need to limit sodium otherwise pickles are a good choice)
Fresh shredded cabbage or coleslaw	Sauerkraut, (same as pickles, limit only if you have high blood pressure)

Diabetes and Fruits

Fruits contain carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, and fiber. They are naturally low in fat -- except for avocados -- and sodium. Fruits often contain more carbs than are found in vegetables.

Best Choices	Worst Choices
Frozen fruit or fruit canned in fruit juice	Canned fruit with heavy sugar syrup
Fresh fruit	Chewy fruit rolls
Sugar-free or low-sugar jam or preserves	Regular jam, jelly, and preserves (unless portion is kept small)
No-sugar-added applesauce	Sweetened applesauce
100% fruit juice or low-carb juices	Fruit punch, fruit drinks, fruit juice drinks, sweetened soda

Diabetes, Meat, and Other Protein

These foods are high in [protein](#). They include beef, chicken, fish, pork, turkey, and seafood. This group also includes beans, cheese, eggs, nuts, and tofu. Selecting non-meat sources of protein can help lower the amount of fat you eat. Use this list to guide your protein choices.

Best Choices	Worst Choices
Baked, broiled, grilled, or stewed meats	Fried meats
Lower-fat cuts of meat, such as top sirloin	Higher-fat cuts of meat, such as ribs
Turkey bacon	Pork bacon
Low-fat cheeses	Regular cheeses
Skinless breast of chicken or turkey	Poultry with skin
Baked, broiled, steamed, or grilled fish	Fried fish
Tofu lightly sauteed, steamed, or cooked in soup	Fried tofu
Baked or stewed beans	Beans prepared with lard

Diabetes and Dairy

This group includes milk and foods made from milk, such as yogurt and sour cream. Milk contains a lot of protein and minerals, including calcium. Use this list to guide your selection of milk products.

Best Choices	Worst Choices
1% or skim milk	Whole milk
Low-fat yogurt	Regular yogurt
Low-fat cottage cheese	Regular cottage cheese
Nonfat sour cream	Regular sour cream
Frozen low-fat, low-carb yogurt	Regular ice cream
Nonfat half and half	Regular half and half

Diabetes and Fats, Oils, and Sweets

Fats, oils, and sweets -- and foods containing them -- often provide lots of calories and little [nutrition](#). Many "snack foods" are filled with fats or oils and sugar. Eating too much of these kinds of foods can lead to [weight gain](#), making it harder to keep diabetes under control. That doesn't mean you have to avoid fats, oils, and sweets altogether. Just select and eat them wisely. Here are some suggestions.

Best Choices	Worst Choices
Baked snacks, such as baked potato chips, baked corn chips, puffed rice, or corn snacks	Snacks fried in fat, such as potato chips, corn chips, pork rinds
Vegetable oils, non-hydrogenated butter spreads, margarine	Lard, hydrogenated vegetable shortening, butter
Reduced-fat mayonnaise	Regular mayonnaise
Light salad dressings	Regular salad dressings
Air-popped or calorie-controlled popcorn	Butter-flavored stove-top popcorn

Diabetes and Beverages

Many beverages are not found on the food pyramid. Some beverages contain lots of carbohydrates while providing very little nutrition. This makes it easy for beverages to contribute to weight gain. Here are some best-choice and worst-choice examples.

Best Choices for Beverages	Worst Choices
Water, unflavored or flavored sparkling water	Regular sodas
Light beer, small amounts of wine or non-fruity mixed drinks	Regular beer, fruity mixed drinks, dessert wines
Unsweetened tea (add a slice of lemon)	Sweetened tea
Coffee, black or with added low fat milk and sugar substitute	Coffee with sugar and cream
Home-brewed coffee and hot chocolate	Flavored coffees and chocolate drinks
Sport drinks	Energy drinks