

Diabetes and Food - What Should I Eat?

To help manage your diabetes, your meals need to be:

- Regular and spread evenly throughout the day
- Lower in fat, particularly saturated fat
- Based on high fibre carbohydrate foods such as wholegrain breads and cereals, beans, lentils, vegetables and fruits.



Matching the amount of food you eat with the amount you burn up each day is important. Not putting too much fuel in your body (keeping food intake to moderate serves) is vital to getting the right balance.

Along with healthy eating, [regular physical activity](#) can help you to manage your blood glucose levels, reduce your blood fats (cholesterol and triglycerides) and maintain a healthy weight.

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Fat

Fats have the highest energy (kilojoule or calorie) content of all foods. Eating too much fat can make you put on weight, which may make it more difficult to manage blood glucose levels. While it is important to try and reduce fat in your diet, especially if you are trying to lose weight, some fat is good for health.

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Saturated Fat

It is important to limit saturated fat because it raises your LDL ('bad') cholesterol levels. Saturated fat is found in animal foods like fatty meat, milk, butter and cheese. Vegetable fats that are saturated include palm oil (found in solid cooking fats, snack foods or convenience foods) and coconut products such as copha, coconut milk or cream.

To reduce saturated fat:

- Choose reduced or low-fat milk, yoghurt, ice-cream and custard.
- Choose lean meat and trim any fat off before cooking.
- Remove the skin from chicken (where possible, before cooking).
- Avoid using butter, lard, dripping, cream, sour cream, copha, coconut milk, coconut cream and hard cooking margarines.
- Limit the amount of cheese you eat and try reduced-fat and low-fat varieties.
- Limit pastries, cakes, puddings, chocolate and cream biscuits to special occasions.
- Limit pre-packaged biscuits, savoury packet snacks, cakes, frozen and convenience meals.
- Limit the use of processed deli meats (devon/polony/fritz/luncheon meat, chicken loaf, salami etc) and sausages.
- Avoid fried takeaway foods such as chips, fried chicken and battered fish and choose BBQ chicken (without the skin) and grilled fish instead.
- Avoid pies, sausage rolls and pastries.
- Rather than creamy sauces or dressings, choose those that are based on tomato, soy or other low fat ingredients. As some tomato and soy sauces can be high in salt, choose low-salt varieties or make them yourself without any added salt.
- Limit creamy style soups.

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Polyunsaturated & Monounsaturated Fats

Eating small amounts of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats can help ensure you get the essential fatty acids and vitamins your body needs.

Polyunsaturated fats include:

- Polyunsaturated margarines (check the label for the word 'polyunsaturated')

- Sunflower, safflower, soybean, corn, cottonseed, grapeseed and sesame oils
- The fat found in oily fish such as herring, mackerel, sardine, salmon and tuna.

Monounsaturated fats include:

- Canola® and olive oils
- Some margarines
- Avocado.

Seeds, nuts, nut spreads and peanut oil contain a combination of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fat.

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Ideas for Enjoying Healthy Fats

- Stir-fry meat and vegetables in a little canola® oil (or oil spray) with garlic or chilli.
- Dress a salad or steamed vegetables with a little olive oil and lemon juice or vinegar.
- Sprinkle sesame seeds on steamed vegetables.
- Use linseed bread and spread a little canola margarine.
- Snack on a handful of unsalted nuts, or add some to a stir-fry or salad.
- Spread avocado on sandwiches and toast, or add to a salad.
- Eat more fish (at least three times a week) because it contains a special type of fat (omega-3) that is good for your heart.
- Do more dry roasting, grilling, microwaving and stir-frying in a non-stick pan.
- Avoid deep fried, battered and crumbed foods

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Carbohydrate

Carbohydrate foods are the best energy source for your body. When they are digested they break down to form glucose in the bloodstream. Insulin takes the glucose out of the blood and deposits it into the muscles, liver and other cells in the body where it is used to provide energy. A regular carbohydrate intake is required to provide our body and brain with instant energy. Most foods contain carbohydrate and also provide us with fibre, vitamins and minerals. Very low carbohydrate diets are not recommended for people with diabetes.

If you eat regular meals and spread your carbohydrate foods evenly throughout the day, you will help maintain your energy levels without causing large rises in your blood glucose levels. If you take insulin or diabetes tablets, you may need to have **between meal snacks**. Discuss this with your doctor, dietitian or Credentialed Diabetes Educator.

All carbohydrate foods are digested to produce glucose but they do so at different rates – some slow, some fast. The **glycemic index** or GI is a way of describing how a carbohydrate containing food affects blood glucose levels.

The type of carbohydrate you eat is very important as some can cause higher blood glucose after eating. The best combination is to eat moderate amounts of carbohydrate and include high fibre foods that also have a low GI.

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Sugar

A healthy eating plan for diabetes can include some sugar. However, it is important to consider the nutritional value of the foods you eat. In general, foods with added sugars should be consumed sparingly (manufacturers sometimes use fruit juice or other sources of sugar to avoid using table sugar). In particular, high energy foods such as sweets, lollies and standard soft drinks should not be consumed on a regular basis.

Some sugar may also be used in cooking and many recipes can be modified to use less than the amount stated or substituted with an alternative sweetener. Select recipes that are low in fat (particularly saturated fat) and contain some fibre.

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Alternative Sweeteners

The use of intense sweeteners by people with diabetes is preferable to use of natural sugars.

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Protein

Choose protein foods that are also low in fat. This will help to reduce the amount of saturated fat you eat. Protein foods include lean meat, poultry without the skin, seafood, eggs (not fried), unsalted nuts, soy products such as tofu and pulses (dried beans and lentils).

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Other Foods, Condiments & Drinks

You can use these following foods to add flavour and variety to your meals.

- Herbs, spices, garlic, chilli, lemon juice, vinegar and other seasonings.
- Products labelled 'low joule' (e.g. low joule/diet soft drinks, low joule jelly).
- Tea, coffee, herbal tea, water, soda water, plain mineral water. [Back to top](#)

More Information

- [NHMRC Nutrition pages](#) - NHMRC (National Health and Medical Research Council) has published guidelines for a healthy diet based on the best available scientific evidence. The results are the Dietary Guidelines

and the the Nutrient Reference Values for Australia and New Zealand Including the Recommended Dietary Intakes (2006).

Source: <http://www.diabetesaustralia.com.au/Living-with-Diabetes/Eating-Well/Food-What-Should-I-Eat/>