

Diabetes for the Underweight

Being underweight can be just as detrimental to your health as being overweight, according to the authors of "Krause's Food, Nutrition and Diet Therapy." Weight loss is a common symptom in uncontrolled diabetes, but managing blood sugars by following a healthy diet that meets your calorie needs while controlling your carbohydrate intake can help an underweight diabetic reach a healthy weight.

Diet Basics

To gain 1 lb. a week you need to eat an additional 500 calories a day. Talk to your doctor about how many calories you should eat each day to gain weight. Most healthy Americans need about 2,000 calories a day, so increasing daily caloric intake to 2,500 calories a day should help most underweight diabetics reach their goal weights. Eating balanced meals that control the amount of carbohydrates, protein and fat can help you better manage your blood sugars, which also will help you gain weight. The diabetic exchange diet can help you develop balanced meals. It divides foods into groups based on similarities in nutrient content and you can "exchange" items within each group to create meals. A balanced 2,500-calorie diet includes 14 starch servings, 10 oz. of meat or meat alternatives, four vegetable servings, three fruit servings, two milk servings and seven fat servings.

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Breakfast

For breakfast, you should have four servings of starch, 2 oz. of meat or meat alternatives, one serving of fruit, one serving of milk and two servings of fat. A sample meal might include two scrambled eggs with two slices of whole wheat toast with 2 tsp. of margarine, and 1 1/2 cups of whole grain, ready-to-eat cereal with 1 cup of milk and a 4 oz. banana. Starches, fruit and milk contain carbohydrates, which raise blood sugar. Controlling the amount and types of carbohydrates you eat at each meal can help you manage your blood sugar. Foods with a low glycemic index -- rolled oats, whole grain bread and milk -- cause only a small rise in blood sugar, while foods with a high glycemic index -- white rice, bagels and doughnuts -- cause a rapid rise in blood sugar. For better blood sugar levels, eat more low glycemic index foods.

Lunch

A balanced diabetic lunch for weight gain might include four servings of starch, 3 oz. of meat or meat alternatives, two servings of vegetables, one serving of fruit, one serving of milk and two servings of fat. For lunch, you might have a turkey sandwich using two

slices of whole wheat bread, 3 oz. of turkey meat and 1 tsp. of mayonnaise. This can be served with 10 whole grain crackers, a small apple, 2 cups of mixed greens with 1 tbsp. of salad dressing and a 6 oz. container of sugar-free yogurt. Meats and fats do not contain carbohydrates. Eating larger portions of meats and fats can help you meet your elevated caloric needs without increasing your blood pressure.

Dinner

For dinner, include four servings of starch, 4 oz. of meat or meat alternatives, two servings of vegetables, one serving of fruit and two servings of fat. A sample diabetic dinner meal to help you gain weight might include 4 oz. of grilled salmon with 1 1/3 cups of brown rice, 1 cup of green beans sauteed in 2 tsp. of olive oil, and 17 grapes.

Snack

Adding a snack to your diet plan also can help you with your weight gain. Eating meals and snacks at the same time every day helps you maintain consistent energy and blood sugar levels. A diabetic snack should include two servings of starch, 1 oz. of meat or meat alternatives and a serving of fat. A sample snack includes a toasted cheese sandwich made with two slices of whole wheat bread, 1 oz. of cheese and 1 tsp. of margarine.

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