

Diabetes and Sugar

If you have diabetes, it doesn't mean you will never have birthday cake or pumpkin pie again. With a little planning, you can have a small serving of your favorite dessert. It's best to save the sweets for special occasions so you don't miss out on the more nutritious foods your body needs. You may also be interested in our book, [The Big Book of Diabetic Desserts](#). But don't worry, [you can include sweet treats on special occasions](#) and still manage your diabetes well.

- See also [Artificial Sweeteners](#)

The Hype About Sugar

The myth that sugar causes diabetes is commonly accepted by many people. Research has shown that it isn't true. Eating sugar has nothing to do with developing type 1 diabetes.

The biggest dietary risk factor for developing type 2 diabetes is simply eating too much and being overweight — your body doesn't care if the extra food comes from cookies or beef, it is gaining weight that is the culprit.

In the past, people with diabetes were told to completely avoid sugar. Experts thought that eating sugar would raise blood glucose levels very high.

Research around this issue has shown that while the [type of carbohydrate](#) can affect how quickly blood glucose levels rise, the **total amount of carbohydrate** you eat affects blood glucose levels more than the type. Now experts agree that you can substitute small amounts of sugar for other carbohydrate containing foods into your meal plan and still keep your blood glucose levels on track.

That doesn't mean you can eat all the sugar you may want. Most sweets contain a large amount of carbohydrate in a very small serving. So you need to be sure to have a small serving.

Saving sweets for a special occasion is the most healthful way to eat so you focus your meal plan on the most nutrient dense foods such as vegetables, beans, whole grains, fruit, non-fat dairy, fish and lean meats.

If you tend to overeat on sweets, don't buy them. Instead, plan to have dessert when you are away from home. Split the dessert with a friend to keep yourself on track.

Including Sweets into Your Meal Plan

Most sweeteners have calories and carbohydrates. Examples are:

- Table sugar (also called white sugar or sucrose)
- Raw sugar
- Cane sugar
- Sugar cane syrup
- Beet sugar
- Honey
- Brown sugar
- Molasses
- Fructose
- Maple syrup
- Cane sugar
- Agave nectar
- Confectioners sugar
- Powdered sugar
- turbinado

- high fructose corn syrup (also called corn sugar)
- rice syrup or brown rice syrup

The key to keeping your blood glucose levels on target is to substitute small portions of sweets and sweeteners for other carb-containing foods in your meals and snacks.

Carb-containing foods include (but are not limited to):

- bread
- tortillas
- rice
- crackers
- cereal
- fruit
- juice
- milk
- yogurt
- potatoes
- corn
- peas.

For many people, having about 45 to 60 grams at meals is about right. **Serving sizes make a difference.** To include sweets in your meal, you can cut back on the other carb-containing foods at the same meal.

For example, if you'd like to have cookies with your lunch, you need to substitute for another carb-containing food. If your lunch is a turkey sandwich with two slices of bread, here are the steps you would take to make the substitution:

1. Your first step is to identify the carb foods in your meal. Bread is a carb.
2. You decide to swap two slices of regular bread for two slices of low-calorie bread (with $\frac{1}{2}$ the carbohydrate) and have the cookies—it's an even trade.
3. Your total amount of carbohydrate remains the same for the meal.

Using the Nutrition Facts Label

You can also use the [Nutrition Facts Label](#) on foods to guide you. The first thing to check is the serving size. The second is the total carbohydrate. The total carbohydrate tells you how much carbohydrate is in one serving of the food.

Label claims

Foods labeled as sugar-free, no sugar added, reduced sugar, and dietetic may still contain carbohydrate. Sugar is only one [type of carbohydrate](#) that affects blood glucose levels. To get the complete amount of carbohydrate, look at the [Nutrition Facts Panel](#) instead of relying on claims on the front of the box.

Sugar on the label

Sugar is listed under the Total Carbohydrate on the Nutrition Facts Label. Keep in mind that it includes both added sugars and naturally occurring sugars, such as the natural sugar in raisins.

Sugar listed on the label does not include sugar alcohols that are in the product. It is voluntary for food manufacturers to list sugar alcohols on the label. (Total carbohydrate does include sugar alcohols in the total.) Some manufacturers list sugar alcohols on the label and some do not. If a food doesn't list sugar alcohols on the label, you can look for it in the ingredient list. Look for ingredients that end in "ol" like maltitol or sorbitol.

The Most Important Thing to Look For

If you don't have a lot of time when reading labels, simply look at the total carbohydrate in a food. The total carbohydrate includes starch, fiber, sugar, and sugar alcohols. Using the amount of total carbohydrate will give you a pretty good number to use for carbohydrate counting.

It is more helpful to check the total carbohydrate because **it includes both sugar and starch**. If you only look at the sugar content, you are not accounting for the starch in a food.

Source: <http://www.diabetes.org/food-and-fitness/food/what-can-i-eat/sweeteners-and-desserts.html>