

Making healthy food choices

Healthy eating, along with regular physical activity, can help you look after your diabetes. It can also help you manage other risk factors like high blood pressure, or unhealthy cholesterol and triglyceride levels.

Healthy eating for people with diabetes is no different from what is recommended for everyone else. There is no need to prepare separate meals or buy special foods – the whole family can enjoy the same healthy meals.

There are various dietary approaches that may be suitable for people with diabetes. These include Mediterranean-style diets, low fat plant-based diets or lower carbohydrate eating plans.

The following guidelines are general recommendations suitable for most people with diabetes. However, a dietitian can help you to develop an eating plan to meet your food preferences and nutritional needs.

To make healthy food choices:

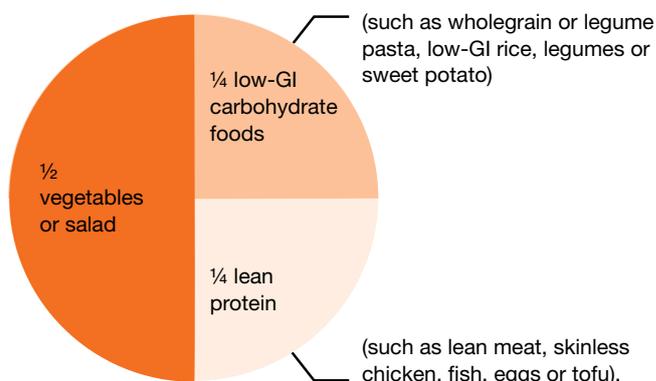
- » eat regular meals to assist with managing energy and blood glucose levels
- » choose high-fibre, lower glycaemic index (GI) carbohydrate foods
- » limit foods that are high in saturated fat and choose healthy fats
- » include lean protein foods with your meals
- » choose foods low in added salt (sodium) and avoid adding salt to your food.

Eat regular meals in the right amounts

Aim to eat three meals during the day and choose serving sizes to meet your energy needs. Talk to your dietitian for advice about your individual needs and the serving sizes that are right for you.

When preparing a healthy meal aim to:

- » fill half of your plate with a variety of non-starchy vegetables or salad
- » fill a quarter of your plate (a palm-sized serving) with a lean protein source, such as lean meat, skinless poultry, fish, seafood, tempeh, legumes or eggs
- » fill a quarter of your plate with a nutritious carbohydrate food that has a lower GI, such as wholegrain or legume pasta or noodles, brown, basmati or Doongara™ rice, quinoa, soba or mung bean noodles, legumes (such as chickpeas, kidney beans, lentils), barley, freekeh, corn, low-GI potato or sweet potato.



Include some healthy fats and oils as part of a balanced meal – such as olive oil in cooking or as a salad dressing, avocado as a spread or nuts and seeds in a stir-fry or salad.

Choose high-fibre, lower GI carbohydrates

Carbohydrate foods are the main source of energy for your body. Your body breaks down carbohydrate from food into glucose, which then enters your bloodstream and is used by the body cells for energy. Glucose from carbohydrate foods is our body's preferred fuel source. Nutritious carbohydrate foods provide fibre and resistant starch for a healthy digestive system as well as many other vitamins and minerals.

Foods that contain carbohydrate include:

- » breads, cereals and other grains or starchy foods, like rice, quinoa and pasta
- » starchy vegetables, like potato, sweet potato and corn
- » legumes such as lentils, chickpeas and dried or canned beans
- » fruit and fruit products
- » dairy products, like milk and yoghurt
- » sugary foods and drinks
- » other sweet foods, like honey, maple syrup and other syrups.

Eating the right type and amount of carbohydrate foods will help manage your blood glucose levels.



Including a small amount of carbohydrate food at each meal can help to spread the carbohydrate food you eat evenly across the day. This can help to maintain your energy levels without causing blood glucose levels to rise above or below your target range. However, everyone has different nutritional needs, so talk to your dietitian about the amount of carbohydrate that is right for you. If you take insulin, it's important to match your insulin dose and insulin type to your carbohydrate intake.

There are different types of carbohydrates. Some carbohydrates break down into glucose quickly and some break down slowly. The GI ranks how slowly or quickly carbohydrate foods affect blood glucose levels. High-GI carbohydrate foods break down into glucose quickly, which means a higher and faster rise in blood glucose levels after eating.

Low-GI carbohydrate foods break down into glucose slowly. They result in a smaller and slower rise in blood glucose levels after eating compared with high-GI foods. The best carbohydrate choices are high in fibre and have a lower GI, such as dense grainy or seeded breads, oats, grains such as barley and quinoa, legumes, and most fruits.

See the 'Sample one-day meal plan' for one example of how to make the best carbohydrate food choices and how to spread these out over the day.

Sugar and sweeteners

Sugar is also a type of carbohydrate. A healthy eating plan can include a small amount of sugar, such as a teaspoon of sugar in a cup of tea or coffee, or a teaspoon of honey on porridge.

It's important to consider the nutritional value and the quantity of the foods you eat. High-sugar foods – such as sweets, lollies and regular soft drinks – provide no nutritional benefit and can cause your blood glucose level to rise above your target range. They can also lead to weight gain and poor health.

While alternative sweeteners are not necessary, nor do they provide any nutrition, some people may still choose to use these to add sweetness without adding sugar and kilojoules.

If you choose to use sweeteners, be aware that swapping sugar for a sweetener in a recipe – or buying products labelled ‘sugar-free’ – does not guarantee they are a healthy choice, or that they won’t affect your blood glucose levels.

There are many different alternative sweeteners available. Always check the nutrition information to make sure the product meets your needs, or ask a dietitian. All of the sweeteners approved for sale in Australia have been tested and deemed safe for use by Food Standards Australia New Zealand.

Limit foods high in saturated fat and choose healthy fats

It’s important to consider both the amount and the type of fat you eat. The main types of fat found in food are saturated, trans and unsaturated fats.

Saturated fats and trans fats

Saturated fats make it more difficult for the body’s insulin to work properly and raise your bloods low-density lipoprotein levels (also known as LDL or ‘bad’ cholesterol).

It is therefore best to limit these in your diet and replace them with healthier fats. Saturated fat is found in animal foods like fatty meat, full-fat dairy foods, butter and cream, as well as plant sources such as palm oil and coconut oil. It’s also found in many take-away and processed foods.

Trans fats can raise your blood LDL cholesterol and lower your high-density lipoprotein levels (also known as HDL or ‘good’ cholesterol). Most trans fats are formed during food manufacturing and can be found in fried foods and baked goods like biscuits, cakes and pastries.

Check the ingredients list for ‘hydrogenated oils’ or ‘partially hydrogenated vegetable oils’ and avoid foods that contain these as they are likely to be high in trans fats.

Unsaturated fats

Unsaturated fats include polyunsaturated fats and monounsaturated fats. These are healthier fats, as they help to reduce your LDL cholesterol levels and increase your HDL cholesterol levels. Replacing saturated fats with unsaturated fats can help to keep your blood vessels healthy and reduce your risk of heart disease.

Polyunsaturated fats include:

- » the fat found in oily fish, such as mackerel, sardines, salmon and tuna (omega-3 fats)
- » nuts and seeds such as walnuts, brazil nuts, pine nuts, sesame and sunflower seeds, chia seeds and flaxseeds
- » sunflower, safflower, soybean, corn, cottonseed, grapeseed and sesame oils.

Monounsaturated fats include:

- » avocado
- » nuts and seeds such as almonds, cashews, hazelnuts, macadamias, pecans, peanuts and pistachios
- » olive, canola, peanut and macadamia oils.





Tips to get the right balance of healthy fats

- Choose reduced or low-fat milk, yoghurt and cheese.
- Choose lean meat, trimmed of fat, and skinless cuts of chicken.
- Limit butter, lard, dripping, cream, sour cream, copha, coconut milk and coconut cream.
- Choose olive, sunflower, canola or other unsaturated oils for cooking and salad dressings.
- Limit pastries, cakes, puddings, chocolates, packaged biscuits and savory snacks to special occasions.
- Limit the use of processed deli meats (like salami) and sausages.
- Limit fatty take-away foods, such as chips, fried chicken, battered fish, pies and pastries.
- Snack on a handful of unsalted nuts, or add some nuts to a stir-fry or salad.
- Spread avocado on sandwiches and toast, or add to a salad.
- Use natural nut and seed spreads instead of butter on toast.
- Eat fish two or three times a week (especially oily fish).

Include lean protein foods

Protein foods can help you feel fuller for longer and are an important part of a balanced meal. Protein foods include meat, poultry, fish or seafood, eggs, nuts, seeds, dairy products, soy products (such as tofu and tempeh), and legumes (dried beans and lentils). Choose lean sources of protein foods.



Choose foods low in added salt and avoid adding salt to your food

Eating too much salt (sodium) is not good for your health and can result in high blood pressure. If your blood pressure is already high, cutting down on salt may help to lower it, and reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke.

Limit your salt intake by choosing more fresh foods that are naturally low in sodium. Look for low-salt or salt-reduced options when buying packaged foods, and avoid adding salt to foods during cooking or before eating. To add flavour without salt, use a wide variety of herbs, spices and condiments (such as lemon or lime juice and vinegar).

Eat plenty of vegetables

Eating plenty of vegetables is important for good health. Most vegetables are low in carbohydrate and kilojoules and will not affect your blood glucose levels. They are a good source of fibre, vitamins and minerals.

Eat a variety of different coloured vegetables and salads, such as tomatoes, cucumber, celery, mushrooms, capsicum, onions, cauliflower, zucchini, broccoli, spinach, peas, cabbage, lettuce, green beans, eggplant, carrot, leek, squash, pumpkin and Asian greens.

What to drink

It's important to stay hydrated throughout the day. Water is the best drink, but alternatives include:

- » plain mineral or soda water flavoured with sliced lemon or lime, frozen berries, cucumber or fresh mint
- » black, oolong, green or herbal tea
- » coffee or decaffeinated coffee with skim, low-fat milk or unsweetened plant milk.

An occasional diet cordial or diet soft drink may add variety without extra sugar or kilojoules.

If you drink alcohol, limit your intake

If you drink alcohol, current guidelines recommend limiting your intake to two standard drinks per day. It's also a good idea to include some alcohol-free days each week.

A standard drink contains 10g of alcohol. It's important to know what a standard drink is for different types of alcohol, so you can monitor your intake.

One standard drink is equal to:

- » 285ml of regular beer
- » 375ml of mid-strength beer
- » 425ml of low-alcohol beer (less than 3% alcohol)
- » 60ml of fortified wine
- » 100ml of wine
- » 30ml of spirits.

If you are taking insulin or certain diabetes tablets, you are at risk of alcohol-related hypoglycaemia (hypo). A hypo is when blood glucose levels drop below 4mmol/L. Hypos can occur while drinking alcohol – or many hours afterwards – and can be dangerous. To reduce your risk of hypos, drink alcohol with a meal or snack that contains carbohydrate and check your blood glucose levels regularly.

Healthy snacks

Some people with diabetes may need to include a carbohydrate-based snack between meals. This will depend on your body weight, physical activity levels and the type of medication or insulin you take to manage your diabetes.

A dietitian can work with you to find out whether you need to include snacks and the best choices to make, but some suggestions include:

- a small glass of low-fat milk
- a small tub of low-fat natural or unsweetened yoghurt
- a serve of fresh fruit
- 2-3 wholegrain crisp bread spread with ricotta cheese, natural peanut butter or avocado.

Standard drinks



Sample one-day meal plan

The following meal plan is one example of how to spread carbohydrate foods evenly over the day and how to include a wide variety of nutritious foods. The foods that contain carbohydrate are highlighted in bold.

The amounts shown here are the suggested amounts for one person – they are a guide only and you may need to adjust them according to your own nutritional needs. Talk to a dietitian for advice on how to cater for your individual needs and food preferences.



More information

An accredited practising dietitian (APD) can help with the best food choices. Contact the Dietitians Association of Australia on **1800 812 942** or visit daa.asn.au

For information about standard drinks, visit alcohol.gov.au

For more information on glycemic index visit glycemicindex.com or gisymbol.com

Breakfast

- ¾ cup of cooked **rolled oats** with **milk**, topped with fresh berries OR
- 2 thin slices of **wholegrain toast**, thinly spread with peanut butter, avocado or ricotta, and tomato or boiled or poached eggs OR
- 1 cup fresh **fruit** salad topped with 100g low fat **natural yoghurt**
- tea, coffee or water

Lunch

- 2 thin slices of **wholegrain bread** or **1 grainy bread roll** with thinly spread avocado or **hummus**
- salad vegetables
- a small serve of lean meat, skinless poultry, tinned fish, eggs, marinated tofu or fat-reduced cheese
- water or sparkling mineral water

Dinner

- palm-sized serve (100 g) of lean meat, skinless poultry, fish, seafood, 2 eggs, 170g firm tofu or 1 cup legumes
- 1½ cups of cooked vegetables OR 2 cups of salad
- 1 cup of **cooked pasta** OR 2/3 cup of **low-GI rice** OR 1 cup of **sweet potato** or corn OR 1 cup of **chickpeas** or **kidney beans**
- water or sparkling mineral water.

Snacks:

- 1 piece of **fresh fruit** OR
- 1 tub of low-fat **natural yoghurt** OR
- 1 cup of low-fat **milk** OR
- 1 slice of **wholegrain bread** OR
- 2 table spoons **hummus** with **carrot** and **celery**
- 30g of unsalted nuts.

The NDSS and you

A wide range of services and support is available through the NDSS to help you manage your diabetes. This includes information on diabetes management through the NDSS Helpline and website. The products, services and education programs available can help you stay on top of your diabetes.