

Healthy Meals for Diabetes

Figuring out what to eat can be one of the most confusing parts of diabetes. It will help you to have a meal plan. You can ask your healthcare team to help you make a meal plan that fits your needs. Your meal plan tells you when to eat your meals and snacks, what kinds of foods to eat, and how much of each food to eat. You don't have to give up all the foods you like but following some guidelines will set you up for success in managing your diabetes.



Choose healthy carbohydrates

Starches, sugars, and fiber are all types of carbohydrates (carbs). Carbs can get a bad reputation since they affect your blood sugar the most. It is important to remember that your body benefits from the right amount of healthy carbs. Fiber can help lower your cholesterol and triglycerides. Fiber is also healthy for your heart. You should have 20 to 35 grams of total fiber each day. Fiber comes from plants. Fiber-rich foods include:

- Whole-grain breads and cereals
- Whole-wheat pasta
- Nuts
- Fruits and vegetables
- Brown rice and quinoa
- Beans and peas

Keep track of the amount of carbs you eat. This can help you keep the right balance of physical activity and medicine. The amount of carbs needed will vary for each person. It depends on many things such as your health, the medicines you take, and how active you are. Your healthcare team will help you figure out the right amount of carbs for you. You may start with around 45 to 60 grams of carbs per meal, depending on your needs.

Here are some examples of foods that have about 15 grams of carbs (1 serving of carbs):

- 1/2 cup of canned or frozen fruit
- A small piece of fresh fruit (4 ounces)
- 1 slice of bread
- 1/2 cup of oatmeal
- 1/3 cup of rice

- 4 to 6 crackers
- 1/2 English muffin
- 1/2 cup of black beans
- 1/4 of a large baked potato (3 ounces)
- 2/3 cup of plain fat-free yogurt
- 1 cup of soup
- 1/2 cup of casserole
- 6 chicken nuggets
- 2-inch-square brownie or cake without frosting
- 2 small cookies
- 1/2 cup of ice cream or sherbet

Choose healthy protein foods

Proteins play a key role in building healthy muscles, bones, skin, and many other parts of your body. Eating protein that's low in fat can help you control your weight. It also helps keep your heart healthy. Low-fat protein foods include:

- Fish
- Plant proteins, such as lentils, beans, peas, nuts, and soy products like tofu and soymilk
- Lean meat with all visible fat removed
- Poultry with the skin removed
- Low-fat or nonfat milk, cheese, and yogurt

Limit unhealthy fats and sugar

Saturated and trans fats are unhealthy for your heart. They raise LDL (bad) cholesterol. Fat is also high in calories. To cut down on unhealthy fats and sugar, limit these foods:

- Butter or margarine
- Palm and palm kernel oils and coconut oil
- Cream
- Cheese
- Bacon
- Lunch meats
- Ice cream
- Sweet bakery goods such as pies, muffins, and donuts
- Jams and jellies
- Candy bars
- Regular sodas

How much to eat

The amount of food you eat affects your blood sugar. It also affects your weight. Your healthcare team will tell you how much of each type of food you should eat.

- Use measuring cups and spoons and a food scale to measure serving sizes.
- Learn what a correct serving size looks like on your plate. This will help when you're away from home and can't measure your servings. For instance, a serving of meat is about the size of the palm of your hand.
- Eat only the number of servings given on your meal plan for each food. Don't take seconds.
- Learn to read food labels. Be sure to look at serving size, total carbohydrates, fiber, calories, sugar, salt, and saturated and trans fats. Look for healthier options such as foods with no added sugar or salt.
- Plan ahead for parties. Then you can still have a good time without diving into unhealthy food choices. Bring a healthy dish to potlucks.

Choose healthy snacks

When it comes to snacks, we often think about foods with added sugar and fats. But there are many other options for healthier snack choices. Here are a few snack ideas to choose from:

Snacks with less than 5 grams of carbohydrates

- 1 piece of string cheese
- 3 celery sticks plus 1 tablespoon of peanut butter
- 5 cherry tomatoes plus 1 tablespoon of ranch dressing
- 1 hard-boiled egg
- 1/4 cup of fresh blueberries
- 5 baby carrots
- 1 cup of light popcorn
- 1/2 cup of sugar-free gelatin
- 15 almonds

Snacks with about 10 to 20 grams of carbohydrates

- 1/3 cup of hummus plus 1 cup of fresh cut non-starchy vegetables (carrots, green peppers, broccoli, celery, or a mix)
- 1/2 cup of fresh or canned fruit plus 1/4 cup of cottage cheese
- 1/2 cup of tuna salad with 4 crackers

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- 2 rice cakes and a tablespoon of peanut butter
 - 1 small apple or orange
 - 3 cups light popcorn
 - 1/2 of a turkey sandwich (1 slice of whole-wheat bread, 2 ounces of turkey, and mustard)

Portion sizes are important for controlling your blood sugar and staying at a healthy weight. Stock up on healthy snack foods so you always have them on hand.

When to eat

Your meal plan will likely include breakfast, lunch, dinner, and some snacks.

- Try to eat your meals and snacks at about the same times each day.
- Eat all your meals and snacks. Skipping a meal or snack can make your blood sugar drop too low. It can also cause you to eat too much at the next meal or snack. Then your blood sugar could get too high.

Be patient

It can be stressful trying to figure out what to eat. But over time, you'll form new habits around your meal plan and healthy guidelines. Then eating right for your blood sugar will be much easier.