

Living Well with Diabetes

Healthy eating guidelines

Healthy eating guidelines aren't just for people with diabetes. When people choose nutritious foods and watch serving sizes, their bodies get the nutrients they need to function at their best. A healthy, balanced diet can also help reduce the risk for getting certain kinds of cancer and heart disease.

Instead of thinking of food as either “good” or “bad”, think about which foods support good health. The following guidelines will help you take better care of your diabetes, and your whole family can benefit too!

Eat a variety of foods

When you eat a variety of different kinds of foods, you have a better chance of making sure you're getting the vitamins and minerals your body needs. Usually choosing the foods that are natural (unprocessed) and most colorful means choosing foods that are healthiest for you.

Be consistent

Try to eat the same amount of carbohydrate at all your meals throughout the week. For example, 2 pieces of toast and ½ cup of orange juice = 45 grams of carbohydrate (30 grams for the toast, and 15 in the orange juice.) If you have this for breakfast, aim for the same amount of carbohydrate at breakfast every day, even if you choose different foods. Do the same for lunches and dinners as well.

Limit fat and cholesterol

Your body needs some fat, but only about one-third (1/3) of the calories you eat each day should come from fat. When you include fat in your diet, choose mono- and poly-unsaturated fat, such as olive, canola, sunflower, or safflower oil. Avoid saturated and trans-fats. These are usually solid at room temperature (such as butter and stick margarine) and are the least healthy of fats. Food labels on most packaged foods will tell you if the product contains saturated or trans-fat and the amount in each serving.

Avoid eating dairy and meat products that are high in fat. Fat from animal products contains cholesterol. Too much cholesterol in your body can block the blood vessels that lead to your heart. That's why adults with high cholesterol are more likely to have heart attacks. Doctors recommend that adults lower their cholesterol levels to protect themselves from heart disease.

Satisfy hunger with low-fat dairy and lean protein

Include small amounts of lean protein with your meals and snacks. Protein will help you feel less hungry and gives your body the nutrients it needs for energy and growth.

Most people need 4 – 6 oz of protein each day. Choose lean meat, such as poultry and fish, and legumes (dried peas, beans, and lentils).

Milk products are also a good source of protein and supply your body with calcium and other important nutrients. Choose non-fat or low-fat products to avoid cholesterol and saturated fat.

Continued on next page

Eat plenty of vegetables, fruits, and grains

The more vegetables, fruits, and grain products you include in your diet, the more vitamins, minerals, and fiber you'll get. Whole grain breads and cereals, legumes, and green and yellow vegetables are high in fiber. And they're loaded with vitamins and minerals too.

Watch serving sizes

Even foods that are low in fat or sugar can have calories. Plan your meals for single serving sizes. That way you won't be as likely to eat too much. Watching serving sizes can also help you maintain a healthy weight. This is especially important for managing diabetes, since being overweight makes it harder to keep diabetes in good control.

Use sugar in moderation

Foods high in simple sugar (such as table sugar) don't offer much in the way of nutrients. They're also high in calories and should only be a small part of your diet. These foods include white bread, cake, and cookies.

Keep salt and sodium to a minimum

Extra salt and sodium can increase your risk for high blood pressure. High blood pressure is more common in people with diabetes and can lead to stroke, heart disease, and kidney failure. Processed food, such as lunch meat, is usually high in sodium. Limit the amount of processed food you eat and use the salt shaker sparingly.

Limit alcohol

Be very careful about when and how you drink alcohol. Alcohol can interact with your diabetes medicines and cause extremely low blood sugars. When you drink alcohol without eating and your blood sugar starts to drop, the alcohol can keep your liver from releasing stored glucose into your blood stream. If your blood sugar goes too low, you can pass out or have a seizure. Alcohol can also raise your triglycerides, a type of fat in the blood. Having high triglycerides can increase your risk for heart disease and stroke.

If you want to drink, be sure to drink in moderation. Include the sugar and calories in your daily food count. If you're trying to lose weight or keep a healthy weight, avoid the empty calories of alcohol.

For more information

Visit the Health and Wellness Resources section on the Kaiser Permanente website at kp.org/wa for more information about diabetes and other health topics.