Living Well with Diabetes
Meal planning options to help you stay in control

Meal planning means choosing foods that will be the most helpful in controlling your diabetes and knowing how much and when to eat those foods. There are several ways you can plan your meals to make sure you get the right foods, in the right amounts, every day.

Here are some of the most common meal plans people use for managing diabetes. Your health care team will tell you more about each of these methods and work with you to find the one that works best for you.

The Healthy Plate Method
The plate method is a great way to begin learning about meal planning. Using the plate method helps you see what a balanced meal looks like.

The Food Target
The goal is to aim for the bulls-eye. Here you’ll find a wide variety of high-fiber, low-fat, and low-sugar food. As you move away from the bulls-eye, the food choices are higher in fat, calories and sugar, and lower in fiber. Aim for the center and you’ll be in the inner circle of health!

The Exchange System
This method also divides food into groups with examples of serving sizes. But the exchange system has more groups and more detail about each group.

Carbohydrate Counting
Carbohydrates come from starches and sugars. Understanding how carbohydrates affect your blood sugar can help you make important decisions about what kinds of foods you choose and when to eat them.

This is especially important if you’re taking insulin. It lets you adjust the amount of insulin you take based on how much carbohydrate you eat.

Before you choose a plan
There a few things you can do before deciding on a method that will help you choose one that works best for you.

Keep a Food Diary
Before you find a meal planning method that will work for you, keep track of what you’re eating now. Keep a record of what you eat for 3 or 4 days. That way, you can find out the kinds of foods you eat most often, the amount you eat, and when you eat them.

Be as honest and detailed in your food record as possible. This information can help you make a plan for managing diabetes that works for you.
Consider Your Goals
Another step before deciding on a meal plan is to know what goals you want to achieve. Consider each of the following questions. You’ll use this information when you meet with your health care team to choose an approach to meal planning that’s best for you.

- What type of diabetes do I have (type 1 or type 2)?
- Do I need to gain or lose weight, or maintain my current weight?
- Do I need to follow a low-fat, low-salt, or low-protein diet because of special health concerns?
- What medicines do I take for diabetes?
- How and how do my medicines affect my food plan?
- What should my blood sugar range be before meals?
- What is my A1c target?

Talk to your health care team
Make an appointment with a member of your health care team to help you get started with meal planning. You can also ask your primary care provider for a referral to see a registered dietitian.

Bring your food diary with you so your care team can help you figure out the amount of carbohydrate, protein, fat, and calories in your daily diet. Then discuss your goals with your care team. Together you’ll be able to work out a meal plan that will work best for you.

After you decide on a plan
Once you’ve chosen a way to plan meals, you might find it helpful to make an action plan to get started with small, positive steps toward a healthier diet.

You don’t have to change your diet overnight. Decide on a few small changes to make each week, and then keep moving forward to a healthier diet. To get started, ask a member of your health care team for a copy of Action plan for healthier eating.