Living Well with Diabetes

Meal planning overview

Meal planning is one of the most important things you can do to keep your blood sugar in control. But it can also seem like a full-time job. Paying attention to what you’re eating and when you’re eating might seem like a huge challenge at first.

Keeping these in mind will help you plan your meals:

- **Quality:** What you eat
- **Quantity:** How much you eat
- **Timing:** When you eat

**Quality: What can I eat?**

Having diabetes doesn’t mean you can’t eat food you enjoy. You can keep eating the foods you like. Just make sure to include lots of nutritious, healthy choices. Healthy, nutritious choices include whole grains, legumes (dried beans or peas, and lentils,) fruits, vegetables, non-fat or low-fat dairy, and lean meats, such as fish and poultry. These foods are high in vitamins, minerals, fiber, and lean protein, and low in saturated fat, cholesterol, and refined sugar.

Healthier food choices aren’t just good for people with diabetes. They’re good for everyone. People who eat a variety of these foods every day have a well-balanced diet and get the nutrients their bodies need.

**Quantity: How much can I eat?**

Learning about serving sizes is the key to meal planning. Food labels on packaged foods and many recipes tell you what a serving size is. These labels tell you how many calories, carbohydrates, protein, and fat are in each serving.

Ask your health care team to help you figure out how many calories you should have every day. Eating the right amount of calories will keep you at a healthy weight, or help you lose weight if you need to.

Eating carbohydrates can make your blood sugar go up higher than other foods. The more you eat, the faster your blood sugar will rise. Eating fat and protein can affect how fast your body turns carbohydrates into sugar.

When you know the amount of carbohydrate, protein, and fat you’re eating at a meal, you can learn to choose foods that help to keep your blood sugar even.

**Timing: When can I eat?**

When you eat is as important as how much you eat. Eating the same amount of food at the same time every day also helps keep your blood sugar even.

Many people find that eating smaller amounts 4 to 6 times a day, instead of eating 2 or 3 big meals, meets their energy needs and helps them from getting too hungry. It also helps keep blood sugar from going too high after a big meal.

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Here are some reasons eating small amounts throughout the day might make you feel better:

- Your body will have a constant source of energy.
- You’re less likely to get so hungry that you overeat when you finally have a meal.
- You might be able to control your weight better because you’re not tempted to binge or overeat.
- It can help you keep your blood sugar in a normal range.

After you learn the basics about serving sizes and the various food groups, you’ll be able to develop new eating habits that fit into your lifestyle and help you manage your diabetes.

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.