

Healthy Eating: Nutrition and Diabetes¹

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A healthy diet, along with exercise and medication, can help control diabetes and reduce the risk of complications. A healthy lifestyle also helps reduce the chances of developing diabetes for those who are at high risk. For a healthy diet, follow these tips.

Add Fiber

To keep “regular” and reduce your risk for some of the complications associated with diabetes, choose more high-fiber foods. The following are just a few examples of high-fiber foods:

- fruits and vegetables (pears, apples, grapes, berries, broccoli, carrots, salad and cooking greens, and white and sweet potatoes)
- whole grain foods (barley, oatmeal, brown rice, and whole wheat breads and pastas)

- beans (black, red, pinto, kidney, lima, and navy), peas (black eyed peas and split peas), and lentils



Figure 1. Whole grain breads are a great source of dietary fiber, as well as many vitamins and minerals needed for good health. Credits: iStock/Thinkstock.com

Be sure to choose healthy foods that you and your family enjoy!

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Choose Low-Fat Foods

Moderate the amount of fat and calories you eat by choosing more low-fat foods such as the following:

- beans (black, red, pinto, kidney, lima, and navy), peas (black eyed peas and split peas), and lentils
- fruits and vegetables
- low-fat milk, cheese, and yogurt
- lean meats (round, sirloin, and loin) and skinless poultry (chicken and turkey)
- fatty fish (salmon, herring, and sardines), which are also heart-healthy



Figure 2. Choose mainly low-fat protein foods, such as low-fat dairy and lean meats. Include fatty fish for their contribution to heart health.

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Limit Salt and Sodium

Reduce your consumption of salt and high-sodium foods such as canned and other processed foods. Here are a few easy steps you can take to limit your sodium intake:

- Buy vegetables that are fresh, frozen without added sauces, or canned with no salt added.
- Use fresh poultry, fish, and lean meats instead of canned, frozen, or packaged forms.
- Cut back on frozen dinners, canned soups, and prepared salad dressings.

- Rinse canned beans and vegetables to remove some of the added salt.

Also, limit the amount of salt you add to your food. Instead, use lemon or lime, as well as herbs and spices such as garlic, dill, rosemary, basil, chives, and red pepper flakes to give your food zest!



Figure 3. You can reduce your intake of salt by using fresh onion and garlic, as well as fresh or dried herbs and spices to flavor foods.

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Control the Carbohydrates

Limit your intake of foods high in sugar such as cakes, pies, cookies, donuts, honey, candy, frozen desserts, chocolate, and sugary beverages. These are all simple carbohydrates that raise blood glucose. Choose your carbohydrates from fruits, vegetables, whole grains, dairy and non-dairy products, beans, and lentils.

Spread your carbohydrate intake throughout the day. This will help you control your portion sizes and give you more flexibility when planning your meals. Consult a registered dietitian (RD/RDN) to learn more about foods that contain complex carbohydrates and how to include them in your meal plan.



Figure 4. In a diabetes class, you learn to plan your carbohydrate intake, including how much and when to eat carbohydrate-containing foods throughout the day. Credits: iStock/Thinkstock.com

Choose Healthy and Tasty Snacks

Choose snacks that contain only small amounts of solid fats and added sugars. Foods that are rich in protein and those that have complex carbohydrates (such as nuts, vegetables, and whole grain foods) will leave you feeling satisfied and fuller longer. Here are some healthy snack ideas:

- low-fat cottage cheese and fruit
- low-fat yogurt with low-fat granola and berries
- vegetables and hummus
- unbuttered air-popped popcorn
- one hard-cooked egg and whole grain crackers

Work with a registered dietitian (RD/RDN) to create a flexible meal plan just for you.



Figure 5. Moderation is key to alcohol consumption for those adults who choose to drink these beverages. Credits: Photodisc/Thinkstock.com

Use Alcohol in Moderation

If you drink alcohol, consume no more than one drink (for women) or two drinks (for men) per day. One drink is

- 5 ounces of wine, **or**
- 12 ounces of regular beer, **or**
- 1½ ounces of liquor.

It is best to drink alcohol with food, not by itself. Check with your pharmacist about possible interactions that alcohol may have with your medications.

Variety is the Spice of Life!

Enjoy a variety of foods from each food group every day. This allows you to consume a balanced diet full of the essential nutrients your body needs.

For more information, see the MyPlate website (<http://www.choosemyplate.gov>) or contact your local UF/IFAS Extension office (<http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/map>).