

Diabetes: healthy diet for diabetics

Four golden rules

1. Don't get fat

Stay trim, taut and terrific. A healthy diet and regular exercise will keep you, your body and your blood glucose in balance. If you don't know what your weight should be, or need some help to trim down, talk to your doctor.

2. Don't eat fat

Fatty foods like meat, cheese, butter and cream will make you fat and increase your blood fat levels. Nutritionists recommend low-fat foods like grains, cereals, fruit and vegetables.

3. Eat complex carbohydrates

Complex carbohydrates are starches, for example from the bread and cereals group of foods. They are slowly broken down by the body to gradually release glucose. They provide a steady, gradual source of glucose for the body.

Simple carbohydrates, such as sugar, are more quickly taken into the body and cause quicker and higher increases in the blood glucose level. They should be avoided, and complex carbohydrates should be eaten instead.

4. Spread your complex carbohydrates

If you eat three large meals during the day, there may not be enough insulin to allow your body to use the large load of glucose each meal provides. Therefore the blood glucose level rises quickly after the meal and then falls steeply before the next meal.

It is preferable to prevent your blood glucose level from swinging too high or too low. It is better to keep it steady. To do this, you need to eat three small meals during the day, with snacks in between. This allows the body's insulin to use the smaller loads of glucose, so that your blood glucose level will not rise or fall as much.

If you need advice and help in changing to a diet low in fat and high in complex carbohydrates or in losing weight, speak to your doctor. Advice from a dietitian or nutritionist is also helpful, particularly if you have specific problems with your diet.

Diet check list

This chart will help you determine which foods are high in sugar or fat. It suggests alternatives. You may want to look over the chart with your doctor, so that he or she can see what changes you will be making to your diet.

| <i>Foods to avoid or limit</i> | <i>Suitable alternatives</i> |
|--|---|
| <i>High in sugar</i> | |
| sugar, honey | tablet or liquid artificial sweetener |
| spreads: jam, marmalade, syrups, Nutella | low joule jam/marmalade, Promite, Vegemite, meat/fish paste |
| sweet drinks: cordial, soft drink, flavoured mineral water, tonic water, fruit juice drinks, ordinary flavoured milk, milkshakes | low joule cordial/soft drink, plain mineral/soda water, pure fruit juice (limit to 1 small glass a day), coffee, tea, herbal teas |
| sweet wine/sherry, port, liqueurs, ordinary beer | dry wine or spirit or low alcohol beer (1 to 2 drinks a day) |
| confectionery: lollies, cough lollies, chocolate (ordinary/diabetic/carob), muesli/health bars | low joule pastilles |
| sweet biscuits (e.g. cream, chocolate, shortbread), cakes, doughnuts, iced buns, sweet pastries | crispbreads, Cruskits, wholemeal crackers, wheatmeal or coffee biscuits, scones, 'no added sugar' fruit loaf |
| sweet desserts: ordinary jelly, fruit in sugar syrup, fruit pies, cheesecakes, puddings, ordinary flavoured yoghurt or ice-cream, ice-cream toppings | low joule jelly, fresh or tinned/stewed fruit without added sugar, custard or junket made with liquid sweetener, plain or diet-lite 'no added sugar' yoghurt, plain ice-cream (1 scoop occasionally), low joule ice-cream topping |
| sweet cereals: some mueslis, Nutrigrain, Cocopops, Honeysmacks, Sugar Frosties | most other cereals, e.g. porridge, Weetbix, All-Bran, Ready Wheats |
| <i>High in fat</i> | |
| mayonnaise, oily dressings, cream sauces, fatty gravies, sour cream | low joule dressings, vinegar, lemon juice, low joule Gravox, plain yoghurt |
| fat on meat, chicken skin, fatty meats (sausages, bacon, salami) | lean cuts of meat with skin and fat removed |
| deep-fried foods, pies/pasties | foods cooked without fat, or with a minimal amount of vegetable oil |
| snack foods: nuts, crisps, corn chips | crisp, raw vegetables, fruit, plain popcorn |
| large amounts of margarine, butter, oil, cream, peanut butter, dripping, lard, ghee | limit to 3-6 teaspoons a day, preferably polyunsaturated margarine or oil |