

# DIABETES - MEAL PLANNING, THE FIRST STEP



Diabetes can be a very serious illness if not managed properly. Some of the complications of diabetes include blindness, heart and nerve disease, circulatory problems and kidney failure. However, with careful planning you can still enjoy life, while taking care of yourself and helping to prevent any adverse problems associated with the disease. The goal for diabetes management is controlling your blood sugar levels so they stay as normal as possible. Several things you can do to ensure optimum health are:

- Follow a balanced eating plan
- Take your medications properly
- Stay active
- Monitor your blood sugar regularly
- Practice good oral hygiene
- Observe healthy foot care
- Get regular physical exams

## Getting Started on Diet and Good Health

Healthy eating is really the first step in controlling your blood sugar and taking care of your diabetes. There is no single eating plan for everyone, rather specific ones tailored to an individual's own health needs. You don't need special diet foods, nor do you need to give up your favorite foods. The game plan for eating smart when diabetic is eating about the same amount of food, in the right balance, at about the same time daily. Consistency is one of the keys to smart eating.

Some basic rules to follow when beginning a diabetes eating plan include:

- Eat a variety of foods
- Consume foods high in fiber, such as fruits, vegetables, grains, or beans. These foods can lower blood glucose and cholesterol levels.
- Limit consumption of saturated and trans-fats
- Reduce salt intake
- Select foods low in cholesterol, such as lean meats, egg substitutes, and low fat dairy
- Monitor alcohol consumption
- Choose water over other beverages

Weight control and exercise are extremely important in controlling your blood sugar. Your doctor or registered dietitian can advise you on a diet plan expressly created for you, as well as design exercise regimen for you to follow. If you are overweight they can also help you on tips for sensible weight loss. For many people, smart eating, active living and weight loss are enough to control blood sugar and maintain good health.

## Carbohydrates

Controlling the amount of carbohydrates in your diet is the most important part of meal planning for diabetics. This can stabilize your blood glucose levels and keep them at a normal level. To achieve this, each meal should contain about the same amount of carbohydrate. Breads, cereals, crackers, as well as potatoes, rice and beans are good sources of carbohydrates. Learning to read food labels can also help with meal planning.

Be careful when consuming table sugar, honey and other calorie containing sweeteners. Diabetics can eat desserts and sweets, but they should be used sparingly in a diet. Save them for special occasions.

Sugar free foods and drinks generally provide fewer carbohydrates and calories to your diet. They taste good and help keep your blood sugar levels lower than foods with large amounts of carbohydrates.

## Protein

Meat and meat substitutes should also be part of a diabetic diet. This group includes lean meats, poultry, eggs, cheese, fish and tofu. Not only do these provide protein, but they also contain essential vitamins and minerals. Make sure to eat small amounts of these foods each day.

## Fat

It is essential that the diabetic patient control the amount of fat in their diet. This not only aids in weight loss, but also helps reduce blood cholesterol and the risk of heart disease. There are a number of low fat or fat free foods on the market today. Fruits, vegetables and low fat dairy products are readily available. When you do use fat, choose monounsaturated fats-such as olive or canola oil. Polyunsaturated fats, found in nuts and seeds, are healthy choices as well. When cooking, baking or broiling meats are much healthier alternatives for enjoying your favorite meat dish.

## Where can I get more information?

**Diabetes Teachers** (nurses, dietitians, pharmacists, and other health professionals)

To find a diabetes teacher near you, call the American Association of diabetes educators toll-free at 1-800-TEAMUP4 (832-6874) or see [www.diabeteseducator.org](http://www.diabeteseducator.org) and click on "Find an Educator."

### Recognized Diabetes Education Programs

(teaching programs approved by the American Diabetes Association)

To find a program near you, call the American Diabetes Association toll-free at 1-800-DIABETES (342-2383) or see [www.diabetes.org/education/edustate2.asp](http://www.diabetes.org/education/edustate2.asp) on the Internet.

### Dietitians

To find a dietitian near you, call the American Dietetic Association's National Center for Nutrition and Dietetics toll-free at 1-800-877-1600 or see [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org) and click on "Find a Nutrition Professional."

## References

Diabetes Diet: Create your own healthy eating plan. Mayo Clinic, May 23, 2006 <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/diabetes-diet/DA00027>

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Diabetes Diet: New guidelines for healthy eating with diabetes. Mayo Clinic, October 13, 2006. <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/diabetes-diet/DA00128>

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**THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA**  
**COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND LIFE SCIENCES**  
**TUCSON, ARIZONA 85721**

**SCOTTIE MISNER, Ph.D., R.D.**  
*Associate Nutrition Specialist*

**CAROL CURTIS, M.S.**  
*Department of Nutritional Sciences*

**EVELYN WHITMER, M.S.**  
*Associate Agent, FCS/EFNEP/FSNEP*

**CONTACT:**  
**SCOTTIE MISNER**  
[misner@ag.arizona.edu](mailto:misner@ag.arizona.edu)

This information has been reviewed by university faculty.  
[cals.arizona.edu/pubs/health/az1228.pdf](http://cals.arizona.edu/pubs/health/az1228.pdf)

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