

Healthy Eating for Diabetes

What is diabetes?

Diabetes is when your blood sugar (glucose) levels are higher than normal. For some people, this is because the insulin in their body doesn't work as well as it did before. For other people, their body isn't making any insulin, or isn't making enough insulin.

Healthy eating to manage diabetes

The choices below can help you to manage your diabetes.

Eat 3 meals a day

Spreading your food over the day helps control blood sugar.

Snacks can reduce hunger between meals. Include snacks if they help you eat smaller portions at your next meal.

Spread carbohydrates over the day

Your body uses carbohydrate foods for energy. Carbohydrate foods raise your blood sugar. It's important to spread them over the day into smaller meals and snacks.

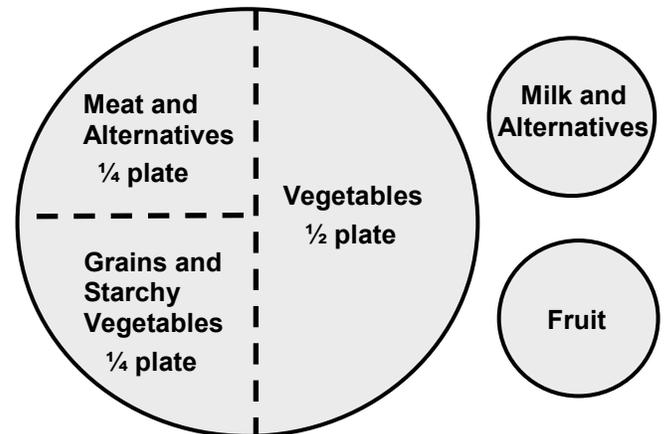
Carbohydrate foods have sugar and starch:

- grains (wheat, oats, rice, barley, rye)
- foods made from grains (bread, tortillas, bannock, naan, roti, pasta, cereal)
- beans, lentils
- fruits
- starchy vegetables (potatoes, yams, corn, squash, parsnips)
- milk
- yogurt
- sweet foods, desserts
- sugar (table sugar, honey, and molasses)

Eat a variety of carbohydrate foods every day to get enough calories (energy), fibre, vitamins, and minerals.

A meal that looks like the one below can help you to spread carbohydrate over the day.

- Fill $\frac{1}{2}$ your plate with vegetables.
- Put grains and starchy vegetables on $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate. Some starchy vegetables are potatoes, yams, corn, squash, and parsnips.
- Put Meat and Alternatives on $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate.



Portion sizes

Choosing healthy portions of food can help you manage your diabetes and reach and stay at a healthy weight. Below is a handy guide to help you choose healthy portion sizes.

- Use **your fist** to guide your portions of grain products and fruit.
- A portion of vegetables can be as much as you could hold in **both hands**.
- Use the **palm of your hand** to guide your portions of meat, fish, or poultry.
- A portion of **Milk and Alternatives** is 1 cup (250 mL) of milk or $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (175 mL) of plain or no sugar added yogurt.



Limit sweet foods and foods with added sugars

Sweet foods and foods with added sugar quickly raise blood sugar. Use the tips below to reduce the amount of added sugar you eat and drink.

- Drink water or sugar-free drinks instead of juice or drinks with added sugar like regular pop, iced tea, and sugar-sweetened coffee and tea drinks.
- 100% fruit juice doesn't have added sugar, but has a lot of natural sugar. Limit 100% juice to ½ cup (125 mL) a day.
- Limit sugar, jam, honey, desserts, candy, syrups, and sweet sauces.
- To sweeten foods like coffee, tea, baking, jams, jellies, and syrups, you can use low-calorie or no-calorie sugar substitutes. Ask your dietitian about using sugar substitutes.



Eat more fibre

Eating fibre helps you manage your blood sugar levels. Fibre at each meal slows the digestion of food and slows the movement of sugar into your blood. This helps to keep blood sugar from rising too high after a meal.

Eating more fibre may also help lower your risk of heart disease.

Use the tips below to eat more fibre.

- Choose higher fibre and whole grain foods more often. High fibre foods have 4 or more grams of fibre in one serving.
- Choose whole grain breads, cereals, crackers, whole wheat pasta, whole wheat couscous, quinoa, barley, oats, and brown rice.
- Eat high fibre cereal often, by itself or mixed with another cereal.
- Eat legumes such as peas, beans, and lentils often. Add them to soups, casseroles, salads, and spaghetti sauce.

- Choose vegetables or fruit at every meal and snack.
Eat these fruits more often:
oranges, berries, pears,
plums.



Drink more fluid when you increase the amount of fibre you eat. Fibre holds fluid in the stool, which keeps stools soft.

- Drink at least 9–12 cups (2.25–3 L) of fluid each day. Water, lower fat milk, and unflavoured soy beverages are the healthiest choices.

Limit salt intake

- Use herbs and spices for flavouring instead of salt.
- Add little or no salt to cooking or to food at the table.
- Eat less canned, processed, and packaged foods. Read the Nutrition Facts tables on food labels to find foods lower in sodium.

Limit alcohol intake

Ask your doctor if drinking alcohol is safe for you. Alcohol may affect your blood sugar control.

If you use alcohol, follow Canada's Low Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines:

- Women: 2 or less drinks per day or 10 or less drinks per week
- Men: 3 or less drinks per day or 15 or less drinks per week

One drink of alcohol is:

- 12 ounces (341 mL) of beer and cider
- 5 ounces (142 mL) of wine
- 1½ ounces (43 mL) of liquor

Alcohol is high in calories. Mixes such as juice or regular pop add sugar and more calories to alcohol. Limit higher sugar drinks like coolers, liqueurs, dessert wines, and mixed drinks.

Choose small amounts of healthy fat

People with diabetes are more likely to get heart disease. Eating these fats in small amounts can decrease your risk.

Some heart healthy fats are listed below.

- oils: olive, canola, peanut, sunflower
- non-hydrogenated margarine
- nuts and seeds, and nut butters
- ground flax seeds, chia seeds, or hemp seeds; add these to foods like yogurt, salads or hot cereals

Use the **tip of your thumb** to guide your portions of oils and fats.



Cut down on saturated fat

Eating saturated fats may increase your risk of heart disease. Use the ideas below.

Milk and Alternatives:

- Choose lower fat milk products (milk, yogurt, cheese).
- Limit lard and butter.

Your thumb is the size of a portion of most cheeses.



Meat and Alternatives:

- Choose lean meats. Limit processed meat like bacon, wieners, deli meat, and sausage.
- Eat fish at least two times each week.
- Choose beans, peas, lentils, and tofu more often.

Sweets and snack foods:

- Eat less snack food like chips, salty snacks, baked goods, chocolate bars, and candy.

Avoid trans fat

- Look for foods with little or no trans fat in the Nutrition Facts table on food packages.

Cutting back on fat may decrease your calories and help you to manage your weight.

Manage your weight

The information in this handout can help you manage your weight. If you're at a healthy weight, try to stay there.

If you have extra weight, losing even 5–10% of your weight may help manage your blood sugars. For example, a person that weighs 220 pounds (100 kg) would try to lose 11–22 pounds (5–10 kg).

Healthy weight loss is up to 1–2 pounds (0.5–1 kg) a week.

If you would like help with weight loss, ask your doctor to refer you to a dietitian.

Next steps

This handout includes lifestyle choices that can help you manage your diabetes. Change can be hard, especially if we try to make too many changes at once.

When you're ready to make a change, it can help to set a goal, and break your goals into small steps. You're more likely to achieve smaller goals.

Ask your healthcare provider if you would like support with goal setting.



Do you have more questions?

If you would like more support, ask your healthcare team to refer you to a dietitian. You can also find out more about diabetes at MyHealth.Alberta.ca and diabetes.ca.

Sample meal ideas

The meal ideas on the next pages show how you can use some of the eating choices in this handout. These are examples only—the best meals for you may look different from these. There is space to write your own ideas for meals.

Look at the smaller meal plan on this page if you are less active or are trying to eat smaller portions. Look at the larger meal plan on the next page if you're active or have a larger appetite. Drink water throughout the day.

Smaller Meal Plan	My Meal Plan
Breakfast	
1 whole grain English muffin 1 cup (250 mL) skim or 1% milk 1 egg scrambled with: ½ ounce (15 g) low fat cheese ½ cup (125 mL) onions, tomato, mushrooms	
Lunch	
1 cup (250 mL) lentil soup 3–4 whole grain crackers (30 grams) ¾ cup (175 grams) plain or no sugar added yogurt ½ cup (125 mL) carrots	
Supper	
2½ ounces (75 grams) baked salmon ⅔ cup (150 mL) brown rice, cooked 1 cup (250 mL) steamed green beans 1 tsp (5 mL) soft, non-hydrogenated margarine ½ cup (125 mL) sliced tomatoes 1 small pear	

Snacks

If you need help to keep portions smaller at meals, have a small snack between meals.

Snacks for a smaller meal plan (each bullet is one snack)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 apple, sliced, with cinnamon • 3 cups (750 mL) plain popcorn with dill or Italian herbs • 1 cup (250 mL) carrots, celery, cucumbers with 2 Tbsp (30 mL) low fat dressing or ¼ cup (60 mL) hummus • 3–6 (30 grams) whole grain or rye crackers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ¾ cup (175 mL) low fat yogurt, plain or no sugar added • 1 cup (250 mL) low fat milk or fortified unsweetened soy beverage • ¼ cup (60 mL) low sodium cottage cheese with ½ cup (125 mL) pineapple chunks, drained

Larger Meal Plan	My Meal Plan
Breakfast	
1½ cups (375 mL) cooked oatmeal 2 Tbsp (30 mL) ground chia seeds Pinch of cinnamon ½ cup (125 mL) berries 1 cup (250 mL) skim or 1% milk	
Lunch	
Chicken sandwich with: 2 slices of whole grain bread 2½ ounces (75 grams) chicken breast, sliced 1 ounce (30 grams) low fat cheese ¼ avocado, sliced ½ cup (125 mL) lettuce 1 Tbsp (15 mL) mustard ½ cup (125 mL) cucumber, sliced 1 cup (250 mL) skim or 1% milk 1 medium apple	
Supper	
2½ ounces (75 grams) lean steak 1 cup (250 mL) baked yams ½ cup (125 mL) roasted cauliflower 1 cup (250 mL) mixed greens 2 Tbsp (30 mL) sunflower seeds 1 Tbsp (15 mL) light dressing 1 cup (250 mL) skim or 1% milk 15 grapes or 1 cup (250 mL)	

Snacks

If you need help to keep portions smaller at meals, have a small snack between meals.

Snacks for a larger meal plan (each bullet is one snack)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 cup (250 mL) carrots, celery, cucumbers with ¼ cup (60 mL) hummus • 2–3 rye crackers and 1 ounce (30 grams) low fat cheese • 1 slice of whole grain toast with 1 Tbsp (15 mL) nut butter, and ½ banana sliced on top • ¼ cup (60 mL) unsalted nuts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ¾ cup (175 mL) low fat plain Greek yogurt with ½ cup (125 mL) sliced strawberries, and ½ cup (75 mL) bran cereal • 1 (30 gram) high-fibre granola bar (4 grams of fibre or higher) • ½ tuna sandwich