



There are three things to keep in mind to help control your blood sugars:

1. When you eat
2. What you eat
3. How much you eat

Here are some tips to get you started.

1 WHEN to eat

Eating at regular times will help control your blood sugars. This also helps to prevent low blood sugars (hypoglycemia).

- Eat at least 3 meals each day including breakfast. This helps you feel satisfied. It also reduces your chances of over-eating later.
- Try to eat at the same times each day.
- Try to eat a meal or a snack every 4 to 5 hours during your day. If you take insulin at dinner or bedtime, you may need a small bedtime snack.
- To prevent low blood sugars, don't skip or delay your meals and snacks.

2 WHAT to eat

You do not need special foods because you have diabetes. In fact, the foods that are good for you are good for everyone in your family. It is a good idea, however to choose high-fiber, heart-healthy foods. Fiber helps to keep your blood sugars in control. Each day try to eat a variety of foods such as:

- Vegetables
- Fruit
- Whole grains, whole grain breads and cereals, whole grain pasta and rice, beans and peas, starchy vegetables (like corn, potatoes or yams)
- Protein foods: fish, poultry (without skin), lean, trimmed meats, tofu, low-fat or nonfat cheeses, peanut butter
- Low-fat, nonfat milk or soy milk, and light yogurt

Choose heart healthy fats such as olive or canola oil instead of butter, shortening, solid fats, or other vegetable oils. In moderation, include other healthy fat sources such as nuts, seeds, and avocado. Limit or avoid sugar sweetened drinks, sweets, baked goods, snack chips, fast food, and other fried foods.

3 HOW MUCH to eat

Your body changes most of the food you eat into blood sugar (or glucose), to supply your body with energy. When you have diabetes, your body has a hard time turning this sugar into energy. More of the sugar stays in your blood.

If you eat too much food, especially too many carbohydrates (or carbs), your blood sugars may get too high. But if you eat smaller amounts and spread your meals throughout the day, you will better control your blood sugar and feel healthier.

What foods contain carbohydrates?

- Grains, beans, starchy vegetables
- Fruit and fruit juice
- Milk and yogurt

A single serving from any of these food groups equals 1 carb serving and contains 15 grams of carbohydrates.

- Sweets and desserts, chips, crackers, and fried foods usually contain a lot of carbs and fats and often do not provide much added nutrition. Plan to eat small servings of these foods as a special treat every once in a while.

For more help with carbs, check the Healthy Eating for Diabetes tipsheet or other diabetes nutrition reference books and classes you can find at our Health Education Centers.

Why are carbohydrates important to my diabetes?

Your body turns most of the carbohydrates (carbs) you eat into sugar (glucose). As we said earlier, when you have diabetes, the cells in your body have problems turning this sugar into energy. So watching your carbs is important.

Eating Well with Diabetes and Carbohydrate Basics

- If you eat too many carbs overall, or too much at once, your blood sugars can rise too high.
- If you eat too few carbs, your body may not get the energy it needs. Your blood sugar can also get too low and you may feel dizzy or faint. This is more likely to occur if you take insulin or certain diabetes pills.

How many carbohydrates should I eat?

The amount of carbohydrates you need depends on your diabetes goals, calorie and nutrition needs and activity level. For most adults with diabetes, it may help to eat between 3 to 4 carb servings (45 to 60 grams carbohydrate) at each meal and 1 carb serving (15 grams carbohydrate) for snacks. Some men and very active adults may require more carbohydrates than this. Work with your dietitian or diabetes educator to find the right amount of carbs you'll need at each meal or snack to feel your best.

How do I read a food label?

Reading food labels can show you how different foods fit into your meal plan. The label tells you what the size of one serving is and the amount of grams of "Total Carbohydrate" that serving has. You do not need to look at the sugar grams, since these are already counted in the Total Carbohydrate grams. Many "Sugar Free" and "No Sugar Added" foods still contain carbohydrates. Check the carbohydrate grams to count these accurately.

Remember: 1 carbohydrate serving/choice = 15 grams total carbohydrate.

Where can I start?

A good place to start is to limit less healthy carbohydrates like candy, sodas or desserts. It helps to:

- Plan meals according to the plate method. Aim for ½ plate of salad or vegetables, ¼ plate of grains, beans, or starchy vegetables, and ¼ plate of protein foods. Include a small fresh or ½ cup fruit and 1 cup milk or lite yogurt.
- Drink mostly water or calorie-free beverages.
- Limit desserts and sweets. When you choose to include a small portion, choose instead of another carbohydrate choice at that meal. For example, don't include fruit if you will have a ½ cup ice cream or 2 small cookies.

When you make your plate, aim for:



Nutrition Facts	
Serving size 1 cup (236ml)	
Servings per container 1	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 120 Calories from Fat 45	
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 3g	8%
Saturated Fat 3g	
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 20 mg	7%
Sodium 120 mg	5%
Total Carbohydrate 11g	4%
Dietary Fiber 0g	12%
Sugars 11g	
Protein 3g	
Vitamin A 80%	Vitamin C 60%
Calcium 4%	Iron 4%

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

Additional resources

- To learn more about nutrition and diabetes, visit: kp.org/healthyliving or call your Health Education Center for diabetes programs, classes and videos available at your local Kaiser Permanente facility.
- Visit your physician's home page at kp.org/mydoctor.
- Visit kp.org/diabetes.
- Some conditions, including diabetes, can be seriously affected by violence or abuse. If you are hit, hurt or threatened by a partner or spouse, there is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to ndvh.org.

This information is not intended to diagnose or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.