



Diabetes: Meal Planning

You can help keep your blood sugar level in your target range by eating healthy foods. Your health care team can help you create a low-fat, nutritious meal plan. Take an active role in your diabetes management by following your meal plan and working with your health care team.

Make Your Meal Plan

A meal plan gives guidelines for the types and amounts of food you should eat. The goal is to balance food and insulin (or other diabetes medications). Your dietitian will help you make a flexible meal plan that includes many foods that you like.

Watch Serving Sizes

Your meal plan will group foods by servings. To learn how much a serving is, start by measuring food portions at each meal. Soon you'll know what a serving looks like on your plate. Ask your health care provider about how to balance servings of different foods.

Eat from All the Food Groups

The basis of a healthy meal plan is **variety** (eating lots of different foods). Choose lean meats, fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat or nonfat dairy products. Eating a wide variety of foods provides the nutrients your body needs. It can also keep you from getting bored with your meal plan.

Learn About Carbohydrates, Fats, and Protein

- **Carbohydrates** are starches and sugars. They are found in many foods, including fruit, bread, pasta, milk, and sweets. Of all the foods you eat, carbohydrates have the most effect on your blood sugar. Your dietitian may teach you about **carb counting**, a way to figure out the amount of carbohydrates in a meal.
- **Fats** have the most calories. They also have the most effect on your weight and your risk of heart disease. When you have diabetes, it's important to control your weight and protect your heart. Foods that are high in fat include whole milk, cheese, snack foods, and desserts.
- **Protein** is important for building and repairing muscles and bones. Choose low-fat protein sources, such as fish, egg whites, and skinless chicken.

Reduce Liquid Sugars

Extra calories from sodas, sports drinks, and fruit drinks make it hard to keep blood sugar in range. Cut as many liquid sugars from your meal plan as you can.

This includes most fruit juices, which are often high in natural or added sugar. Instead, drink plenty of water and other sugar-free beverages.

Eat Less Fat

If you need to lose weight, try to reduce the amount of fat in your diet. This can also help lower your cholesterol level to keep blood vessels healthier. Cut fat by using only small amounts of liquid oil for cooking. Read food labels carefully to avoid foods with unhealthy trans fats.

Timing Your Meals

When it comes to blood sugar control, when you eat is as important as what you eat. You may need to eat several small meals spaced evenly throughout the day to stay in your target range. So don't skip breakfast or wait until late in the day to get most of your calories. Doing so can cause your blood sugar to rise too high or fall too low.