

Type 2 Diabetes Food List

What is Type 2 Diabetes?

Diabetes is a condition characterized by elevated levels of glucose (sugar) in the blood due to the body's inability to use it effectively. In Type 2 diabetes, this occurs because the pancreas either does not produce enough insulin (the hormone that helps glucose enter body cells) or the insulin produced does not function properly, leading to insulin resistance.

The Importance of Good Blood Glucose Control

People with Type 2 diabetes must manage their blood glucose levels carefully. Equally important is maintaining good heart health. Adopting healthier lifestyle habits, including changes to diet and physical activity, plays a crucial role in lowering the risk of diabetes-related complications both now and in the future.

What Can You Eat?

People with diabetes should follow a healthy diet similar to that of individuals without diabetes. This diet should be low in saturated fat, rich in fiber, and include a wide variety of fruits and vegetables.

The Eatwell Guide

The Eatwell Guide illustrates the main food groups and indicates the recommended proportions of each that should be included in your diet to achieve a balanced and healthy eating pattern.

Ten Tips for a Balanced Diet:

1. Eat regular meals

Start your day with breakfast to help control hunger and prevent overeating later

2. Control portion size

Reduce your portion sizes to help manage and maintain a healthy weight. For guidance:

- Starchy carbs (potatoes, bread, pasta): about the size of your fist
- Meat, fish, or poultry: roughly the size of your palm
- Vegetables or salad: two handfuls
- Fruit: a cupped hand
- Oil or fat spread: about the size of your thumb

Try using smaller plates, fill half your plate with vegetables, and avoid going back for seconds.

3. Include carbohydrates daily

Carbs provide energy, so include some each day. Choose wholegrain foods, fruits, vegetables, beans, pulses, and low-fat dairy. Watching portion sizes can help with weight control and blood sugar management.

4. Limit saturated fats

Some saturated fats raise cholesterol. Cutting back on fats like butter, cheese, processed meats, and pastries can reduce calorie intake and support weight loss.

5. Aim for at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables daily

Enjoy any fruits, vegetables, or salads you like, but be cautious with dried fruits and juices. Try to include a variety for maximum benefit.

6. Replace some meat with plant protein

Swap meat for beans, pulses, and lentils to lower fat intake and boost fiber in your meals.

7. Increase fiber intake

Fiber helps lower cholesterol and may protect against certain cancers. Add fiber-rich foods to soups, stews, and casseroles

8. Eat fish regularly

Fish provides lean protein and heart-healthy omega-3 fats. Aim for two portions a week of oily fish such as salmon, mackerel, or sardines.

9. Limit sugar intake

You can still enjoy sugar in moderation. Keep sugary foods as occasional treats and opt for sugar-free drinks when possible. Artificial sweeteners are safe to use.

10. Stay hydrated and active

Drink 8–10 glasses of fluids daily, preferably water. Tea, coffee, herbal teas, no-added-sugar squash, and diet fizzy drinks also count. You don't need to avoid alcohol but monitor your intake. Additionally, try to increase your daily physical activity.

Foods for People with Diabetes

Foods labeled as "suitable for diabetics" do not offer any special advantages. They are often high in calories, can still raise your blood

glucose levels, and may have a laxative effect. Regular packaged foods can be part of a healthy diet as long as you pay attention to portion sizes and how frequently you consume them.

Which Foods Affect Your Blood Glucose?

All carbohydrates are broken down into glucose, which the body's cells use for energy. Starchy carbohydrates include bread, rice, pasta, breakfast cereals, and potatoes. Sugary carbohydrates cover items like biscuits, sweets, chocolate, jams, and sugary drinks. Fruits and milk contain natural sugars, while dried fruits and juices have these sugars in more concentrated amounts.

Every type of carbohydrate will raise your blood glucose levels. Many people find it helpful to spread carbohydrate intake evenly throughout the day to maintain stable blood glucose. Others may benefit from reducing the amount of carbohydrate they eat to better control their blood sugar. A lower-carbohydrate diet might be an option for you, but it's important to discuss this with a healthcare professional, preferably a dietitian, since it may not be appropriate for everyone and your medication might need adjustment.

How much your blood glucose rises depends on several factors:

- The amount of carbohydrate in your food and drinks
- Your level of physical activity
- How much insulin your body still produces and how effectively it works
- Your medication

Blood Glucose Targets

Some people with Type 2 diabetes use a blood glucose monitor to check their levels regularly. Most visit their GP or practice nurse for an HbA1c test at least once a year. HbA1c reflects your average blood glucose over the past three months. The general target is an HbA1c of 48 mmol/mol, but this goal should be set together with your healthcare team. If you experience hypoglycemia or have other health issues, your target may be set higher.

Weight Loss

If you are overweight, losing weight is one of the most effective ways to improve blood glucose control. Weight loss helps insulin work better and reduces insulin resistance. It can also lower your cholesterol and blood pressure. Although losing weight can be challenging, research shows that losing just 5-10% of your current body weight can lead to significant health benefits. Recent evidence suggests that losing around 15% of your weight, sometimes through meal replacements, may even put diabetes into remission. If you plan to lose weight and make major changes to your diet or activity levels, it's important to consult your healthcare team as your medication might need adjustment.

Get Active

Regular physical activity is vital for a healthy lifestyle and can:

- Help control blood glucose by improving insulin effectiveness
- Lower the risk of heart disease and stroke
- Support weight management

Aim to do at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise on five days each week. Moderate activity means breathing more deeply and feeling warmer than usual. Try to reduce the amount of time you spend sitting still throughout the day.

Know Your Condition

After being diagnosed with diabetes, you should have access to a dietitian. Many education programs are available to help you learn how to manage Type 2 diabetes, either through group sessions or one-on-one consultations. Check with your GP surgery to find out what support is available near you.

Summary

Type 2 diabetes is a condition where blood glucose levels are too high due to insufficient insulin or insulin resistance. Maintaining good blood glucose control is essential to reduce the risk of complications. For those who are overweight, losing weight is the single most important step you can take. Working with a dietitian can help you make lifestyle, dietary, and physical activity changes that are achievable, enjoyable, and sustainable over the long term.

More information:

Additional Food Fact Sheets on topics such as Type 1 Diabetes and Healthy Eating are available at www.HealthEH.com