

Food choices

Healthy eating for people with diabetes is similar to what is recommended for everyone. By choosing healthy foods and being active you will help manage your blood glucose levels.

There is no need to follow a diet, prepare separate meals or buy special foods, so relax and enjoy healthy eating along with the whole family!

What should I eat?

To help manage your diabetes, your meals need to be:

- Low in fat, particularly saturated fat
- Based on quality carbohydrate foods, such as wholegrain bread and cereals, beans, lentils, vegetables and fruits.
- Regular and spread evenly throughout the day

Along with health eating, regular physical activity can help you to manage your blood glucose levels, reduce your blood fats and maintain a healthy weight.

Fats

Fats have the highest kilojoule (calorie) content of all foods. Eating too much fat can lead to weight gain, poor blood glucose control and can increase blood fats (cholesterol and triglycerides).

However small amounts of healthier fats add flavour to your food, may improve your blood fat level, and reduce your risk of heart disease. Therefore, the type of fat you eat is important, as well as the amount.

Types of fat

Saturated fat

It is important to limit saturated fat as it raises your LDL ('bad') cholesterol levels.

Saturated fat is found in animal foods like meat, milk, butter, and cheese. Vegetable saturated fats include palm oil (found in solid cooking fats, snack foods or convenience foods) and coconut products such as copha and coconut milk or cream.

Tips to reduce your saturated fat intake:

- Choose low-fat milk, yoghurt, ice cream and custard.
- Limit the quantity of cheese you eat and try reduced fat and low-fat varieties
- Choose lean meat and trim any fat off before cooking. Remove the skin from chicken before cooking
- Avoid the use of butter, lard, dripping, cream, sour cream, copha, coconut milk, coconut cream and hard cooking margarines
- Limit pastries, cakes, puddings, chocolate and cream biscuits to special occasions
- Limit pre-packaged biscuits, savoury packet snacks, cakes, frozen and convenience meals
- Limit the use of sausages and processed deli meats (Devon, polony, fritz, luncheon meat, chicken loaf, salami etc)
- Avoid fried take away foods such as chips, fried chicken and battered fish. Choose BBQ chicken (skin off) and grilled fish instead.
- Avoid pies, sausage rolls and pasties
- Choose tomato based sauces rather than creamy sauces, and avoid creamy style soups

Polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fat

Some fat is important for good health. Use a variety of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats to achieve a good balance.

Polyunsaturated fats include:

- Sunflower, safflower, soybean, corn, cottonseed, grapeseed and sesame oils
- The fat found in oily fish such as herring, mackerel, sardines, salmon and tuna
- Polyunsaturated margarines (check the label for the word polyunsaturated)

Monounsaturated fats include:

- Canola and olive oil
- Avocado

Seeds, nuts, nut spreads and peanut oil contain a combination of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fat.

Tips for enjoying healthy fats:

- Eat more fish (at least three times a week) because it contains a special type of fat (omega 3) that is good for your heart
- Stir fry meat and vegetables in a little canola oil (or oil spray) with garlic or chilli
- Dress a salad or steamed vegetables with a little olive oil and lemon juice or vinegar
- Sprinkle sesame seeds on steamed vegetables
- Use linseed bread and spread a little canola margarine
- Snack on a handful of unsalted nuts, or add some to a stir fry or salad
- Spread avocado on sandwiches and toast, or add to a salad
- Avoid deep fried, battered and crumbed food
- Do more dry-roasting, grilling, microwaving and stir-frying in a non-stick pan or wok.

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrate foods are the main energy source for your body. When they are digested they break down to form glucose in the bloodstream. If you eat regular meals and spread your intake of quality carbohydrate foods evenly throughout the day, you will help maintain your energy levels without causing large rises in your blood glucose levels.

Not all carbohydrate foods are the same. Traditionally, carbohydrate-containing foods have been classified as either containing simple sugars; like fruit and table sugar, or complex carbohydrates; like breads, cereals, legumes and starchy vegetables. This was based on the physical structure of the carbohydrate in the food. A new method of classifying carbohydrate foods in the 1980s called the Glycemic Index has proven this information to be outdated.

The Glycemic Index or GI is a way of describing how a carbohydrate containing food affects blood glucose levels. Foods with a low GI raise blood glucose more slowly than foods with a high GI. This does not mean that you can only eat carbohydrate foods that are low in GI but including these low GI foods throughout the day, ideally one at each meal, can help maintain healthy blood glucose levels.

The foods listed below all contain carbohydrates. Those in **BOLD** have a low GI.

- Bread – especially wholegrain and wholemeal varieties such as **Burgen Breads™**, **Multigrain**, **Sourdough** and **pita**.

- Crispbread crackers and biscuits such as Westons Ryvita, Arnott's Rye Cruskits™, Salada™, Arnott's Full o'Fruit™, Spicy Fruit Rolls™ and Freedom Fruit Cookies™
- Breakfast cereals - **rolled oats** or **untoasted muesli**, **All-bran™** or **All Bran Fruit n Oats™**, **Mini Wheats™ (whole-wheat)** or **Guardian™**
- Aldente pasta, rice (basmati, or doongara) and other grains such as **barley**, **bulgar** and couscous.
- Legumes - **baked beans**, **kidney beans**, **chick peas**, **lentils** and **three bean mix**
- Fruit – all types such as **apples**, **oranges**, **peaches**, **bananas**, and **melons**. Fruit is a good source of fibre; try to eat the whole fruit rather than drinking the juice.
- Milk products or dairy alternatives – choose low fat varieties of **milk**, **soy drink** (calcium fortified), **custard**, **yoghurt** and ice cream.
- Starchy vegetables – potatoes, **sweet potato**, **yams**, **sweet corn**.

Other vegetables are generally low in carbohydrate and therefore have little effect on your blood glucose levels. Include a least five serves of vegetables each day.

Watch out for sources of carbohydrate that do not provide many nutrients (like vitamins and minerals) or are high in fat. These include:

- Cakes, biscuits, lollies, chocolate
- Soft drinks, cordial
- Sugar, jam, honey

You can still eat these foods but only have them in small amounts, for example a teaspoon of sugar in tea/coffee or thinly spread ordinary jam on multigrain bread.

Alternative sweeteners such as Splenda™ or Equal™ and foods containing sweeteners such as low joule or diet cool drinks and cordials can be used if preferred.

Does the amount of carbohydrate I eat matter?

Our actual blood glucose levels are determined by both the quality of carbohydrate, or GI of the carbohydrate and the quantity of the carbohydrate. If you eat too much of any carbohydrate your blood glucose levels will rise, this includes low GI foods. This also means that you should be able to eat small amounts of high GI foods. The best thing to do is follow the guidelines below and test your blood glucose levels to see how your body responds to different amounts of carbohydrate foods.

Checklist for carbohydrates

- Is it high in fibre?
- Does the food give you other nutrients, i.e vitamins, minerals, protein
- Does it have a low GI value?

Alcohol

If you drink alcohol, the recommended daily intake is:

- Up to two standard drinks a day for women
and
- Up to three a day for men
- Aim for at least two alcohol free days each week

One standard drink is equal to:

100ml wine,
285ml regular beer
375ml low alcohol beer (less than 3% alcohol)
30ml spirits

- Drinking excessive amounts of alcohol can cause hypoglycaemia if you are taking insulin or some types of diabetes tablets
- Eat a meal or have some carbohydrate containing foods when drinking alcohol. It is advisable to eat a carbohydrate containing snack a few hours after consuming alcohol, i.e before bed
- Discuss alcohol with your doctor or diabetes educator
- All alcoholic drinks are high in kilojoules (calories). As a comparison, 30ml spirits contains the same kilojoules as a small steak.
- Low alcohol or light beers are a better choice than regular beers because they are lower in alcohol
- Choose dry wines in preference to sweet or dessert wine
- When mixing drinks use low Joule/diet mixers such as diet cola, diet ginger ale or diet tonic water

Summary

- Eat plenty of breads, grains, cereals (preferably wholegrain), vegetables (including legumes) and include them at each meal
- Eat regular, moderately sized meals that contain quality carbohydrates and space them evenly throughout the day
- Try to include some low GI carbohydrate foods each day
- Eat foods lower in fat and particularly low in saturated (animal, palm and coconut) fat.

Food Labelling

All packaged foods must have an **Ingredient List** on the label. All ingredients are listed in descending order by weight. Current guidelines require the percentage of the key ingredient to be listed. Any ingredients that can cause an allergic reaction must be declared. In general, people with diabetes need to limit foods that contain a high proportion of saturated fats and should also limit foods that contain a large proportion of high glycemic index sugars. Common names for saturated fats and high glycemic index sugars are:

Saturated Fats	High GI Sugars
Animal fat	Dextrose
Butter	Glucose
Coconut	Glucose syrup
Copha	Malt
Cream	Malt extract
Di or mono-glycerides	Maltose
Lard	Maltodextrins
Mayonnaise	
Milk solids	
Palm oil	
Shortening	
Tallow	

If one or more of these names are found in the first one to three ingredients on the ingredient list, the product is likely to be high in that particular component. Note that saturated fats such as palm oil are often listed on ingredient panels as vegetable oil or fat. For example, potato chips that have vegetable oil as their second ingredient may still be high in saturated fat, if the vegetable oil listed in the ingredients is actually palm oil. Make sure to check the saturated fat percentage on the nutritional panel.

Food labelling

The **Nutrition Information Panel** provides very useful information that can be used to decide whether a food is suitable for someone with diabetes.



Serving Size

This is the average serving size of the product as determined by the manufacturer. However, this may not be the same size as the serving you have.

Per 100g

100g is a useful standard to compare products to see which is lower in fat. Use this information when choosing products.

NUTRITION INFORMATION

SERVINGS PER PACKAGE: 1
SERVING PER SIZE: 50g

Fat & Saturated fat

Use the figure per 100g, compare similar products and pick the one with less fat and saturated fat. This food is very low in fat.

Carbohydrate

Total: This includes both sugars and starches in food.

Sugars: This informs you how much of the total carbohydrate is sugar. This includes added sugar as well as natural sugars, lactose (milk sugar) and fructose (fruit sugar). Sugar content alone will not predict the effect of the food on your blood glucose level.

	PER 50g SERVE	PER 100g
Energy	501kj	1002kj
Protein	3.5g	7.0g
Fat	0.4g	0.8g
Carbohydrate		
-total	23.3g	50.6g
-sugars	7.5g	15.0g
Dietary fibre	3.4g	6.8g
Cholesterol	Nil	Nil
Sodium	195mg	370mg
Potassium	145mg	290mg

Sodium (salt)

Choose, where possible, products with reduced or no added salt.

Dietary Fibre

Use the figure per 100g and pick the product that is higher in fibre. Try to have approximately 30g of fibre each day. This food is high in fibre.

Attend a Diabetes WA Shop Smart tour to learn more about label reading!

An example of healthy meal choices

Choose foods you enjoy and which satisfy you.

Low and moderate GI foods are highlighted in **bold** in the suggested menu below. Try to include them at each meal and snack. This will help to manage your blood glucose levels.

Breakfast – choose from:

- Breakfast cereal preferably wholegrain such as **porridge**, **All-Bran™**, **Mini-wheats™**, **plain untoasted muesli** – with **low fat milk**
- **Bread or toast**, preferably **wholegrain**, **wholemeal** or **fruit bread** with thinly spread margarine, peanut butter, jam, Vegemite™ or try with **baked beans**, grilled tomato, or sardines
- **Fruit**

Light meal – choose from:

- Soup, preferably containing vegetables and **legumes**
- Sandwich made with bread, roll, crackers or crispbread, preferably **wholegrain** or **wholemeal**, with thinly spread margarine or avocado
- Salad vegetables
- A small serve of lean meat, skinless poultry, seafood, egg, fat reduced cheese or a more generous serve of **legumes** (such as **beans** or **lentils**)
- **Fruit**

Main meal – choose from:

- **Starchy vegetables, pasta or rice**
- Other vegetables (include freely)
- A small serve of lean meat, skinless poultry, seafood, egg, fat reduced cheese or a more generous serve of **legumes**
- Bread, roll, crackers or crispbread, preferably **wholegrain** or **wholemeal**, with thinly spread margarine or avocado
- **Fruit** or **low fat milk pudding, yoghurt or ice cream**

You can have your main meal at lunch or dinner, whichever you prefer.

Between meal snacks

If you are taking insulin or tablets for your diabetes discuss whether you need to have between meal snacks with your dietitian or diabetes educator. These could include fruit, wholegrain bread, fruit bread, high fibre biscuits, low fat milk, or yoghurt.

How much to eat?

While you may be choosing the right foods, you still may need some assistance achieve and maintain a healthy weight/waist.

An Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) can assist you with evidence based weight loss advice.

To find a dietitian in your area, contact

- Diabetes WA on 1300 136 588
- Or check for Accredited Practising Dietitians under 'D' in the Yellow Pages

Dietitians are based in many local hospitals, diabetes centres and community health centres and are also listed in the telephone directory.



For more information:

Diabetes WA Level 3, 322 Hay Street, Subiaco WA 6008

1300 136 588

www.diabeteswa.com.au