

# *Meal Planning for Diabetes Management*

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***16 Million of us have diabetes!!!.... One-Third of us, who have it now, don't know we have it!***

Meal planning can be one of the most challenging aspects of diabetes management. On a daily basis, individuals are faced with many decisions to make regarding the types of foods to buy, how to prepare these foods, how much to eat, and when to eat.

For many people in the aging population, there are often additional obstacles that may be faced:

- Changes in taste and smell due to medications or as part of the normal aging process
- Difficulty chewing or swallowing certain foods
- Difficulty preparing or buying foods
- Consuming a decreased variety of foods
- Diet restrictions which make meals less appetizing
- Difficulty eating due to illness
- Decreased appetite
- Consuming more carbohydrate and less protein
- Preparing food for one person and/or eating alone

There have been many changes in diabetic meal plans over the years. It was previously thought that people with diabetes should avoid all simple sugars. *More current research shows that people should actually focus on the total amount of carbohydrate eaten at a given time rather than simple sugars.*

This is due to the fact that all of the carbohydrate that is eaten is converted to blood sugar. Carbohydrates are found in starchy foods such as breads, pastas, and cereals. They are also found in fruits, milk, yogurt and desserts. When we eat carbohydrate, 100% of it is converted to blood sugar in anywhere from 15 minutes to 1½ hours.

It is best to have your meal plan individualized by a registered dietitian or diabetes educator to help determine the number of grams of carbohydrate to be consumed at each meal. Most meal plans vary from 30-75 grams of carbohydrate per meal. This should be individualized, based on your daily caloric needs. You can use the Nutrition Facts on food labels to determine the number of grams of carbohydrate per serving. A small serving of fruit, a cup of milk or yogurt and a serving of starch (rice, pasta or cereal) all have about 15 grams of carbohydrate.

***Every individual with diabetes would do best to consume a consistent number of grams of carbohydrate at the same time every day.***



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Beside carbohydrate, foods are also made up of protein and fats. Protein is found in foods such as beef, poultry, pork, fish, cheese and eggs. When protein is eaten, only 60% of it is converted to blood sugar. This takes about 3 hours to occur. Protein does not significantly affect the blood sugar unless large portions are consumed. It is best to limit meat to 2-3 servings per day. One serving should be 3 ounces or less. Three ounces of meat is about the size of a deck of cards.

Fat has very little effect on blood sugar. Only 10% of the fat we eat is converted to blood sugar and this takes about 6 hours to occur. It is however important to limit the intake of saturated fat in the diet as fat increases the risk for developing heart disease. Saturated fats are found mainly in animal products such as whole milk, butter, fatty meats, cream cheese and sour cream. Fats should be limited to about 1-2 servings per meal. One serving of fat would be one teaspoon of butter, margarine, oil or mayonnaise. If light products are used, you may use a tablespoon.

Meal planning can be challenging, but the *Guide for Healthy Eating* table below may help you:

<b>GRAINS, BEANS AND STARCHY VEGETABLES</b>	<b>6-11 servings Or 2-3 servings per meal or snack</b>	<b>1 slice of bread ½ cup of cooked pasta ⅓ cup of beans ¾ cup unsweetened cereal 1 small potato</b>
<b>VEGETABLES (not including potatoes)</b>	<b>3-5 servings</b>	<b>1 cup of raw vegetable ½ cup of cooked</b>
<b>FRUITS</b>	<b>3-4 servings</b>	<b>1 small apple, orange, or pear (about the size of a tennis ball)</b>
<b>MILK GROUP</b>	<b>2-3 servings</b>	<b>1 cup of milk 1 cup of yogurt (without added sugar)</b>
<b>MEAT GROUP (includes eggs and cheese)</b>	<b>2-3 servings</b>	<b>3 ounces or less (about the size of a deck of cards)</b>



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- Sweets (cookies, candy, cakes, pie) can be eaten in moderation, if substituted for other carbohydrates in the diet.
- Artificial sweeteners, such as Aspartame, Sucralose, Saccharin, and AcesulfameK, are often used to help limit calories and carbohydrate in the diet.
- Alcohol can either raise or lower the blood sugar. It is important that you never drink alcoholic beverages on an empty stomach. If you take medication for blood sugar control, be sure to consult your doctor before consuming alcohol.
- Another important consideration is sodium intake. The ADA recommends that people with diabetes limit sodium intake to about 2400 mg per day or about 800 mg per meal.

It is important to eat your meals around the same times every day and the same portions. Most people do best with 3 meals per day. You may need snacks between meals or at bedtime to help control your blood sugar.

Diabetic meal planning does not need to be boring or tasteless. There are many diabetic cookbooks with delicious recipes. Check your local library! Try a new low fat recipe or a new healthier food product this week!

There are also many frozen meals, which list the diabetic exchanges on the label. These are easy to prepare and can be incorporated into most meal plans.

Some communities offer programs that deliver diabetic meals to your home and many senior centers also provide low cost, nutritious meals. Socializing with others can make meals more fun and interesting as well!

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