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## Diabetes and Nutrition

### Why does it matter what I eat?

What you eat is closely connected to the amount of sugar in your blood. The right food choices will help you control your blood sugar level.

### Do I have to follow a special diet?

There isn't one "diabetes diet." Your doctor will probably suggest that you work with a registered dietitian to design a meal plan. A meal plan is a guide that tells you what kinds of food you can choose at meals and snack time and how much to have. For most people with diabetes (and those without, too), a healthy diet consists of 40% to 60% of calories from carbohydrates, 20% from protein and 30% or less from fat.

### Can I eat any sugar?

Yes. In recent years, doctors have learned that eating some sugar doesn't usually cause problems for most people with diabetes--as long as it is part of a balanced diet. Just be careful about how much sugar you eat and try not to add sugar to foods.

### What kinds of foods can I eat?

In general, at each meal you may have 2 to 5 choices (or up to 60 grams) of carbohydrates, 1 choice of protein and a certain amount of fat. Talk to your doctor or dietitian for specific advice.

**Carbohydrates.** Carbohydrates are found in fruits, vegetables, beans, dairy foods and starchy foods such as breads. Try to have fresh fruits rather than canned fruits (unless they are packed in water or their own juice), fruit juices or dried fruit. You may eat fresh vegetables and frozen or canned vegetables. Condiments such as nonfat mayonnaise, ketchup and mustard are also carbohydrates.

**Protein.** Protein is found in meat, poultry, fish, dairy products, beans and some vegetables. Try to eat poultry and fish more often than red meat. Don't eat poultry skin, and trim extra fat from all meat. Choose nonfat or reduced-fat dairy products such as cheeses and yogurts.

**Fat.** Butter, margarine, lard and oils add fat to food. Fat is also in many dairy and meat products. Try to avoid fried foods, mayonnaise-based dishes (unless they are made with fat-free mayo), egg yolks, bacon and high-fat dairy products. Your doctor or dietitian will tell you how many grams of fat you may eat each day. When eating fat-free versions of foods (like mayonnaise and butter), check the label to see how many grams of carbohydrates they contain. Keep in mind that

these products also often have added sugar.

## What is the exchange list?

The exchange list (see the sample below) is a tool to help you plan healthy meals and snacks. To add variety to your diet, you can substitute certain foods for other foods in the same group. Some examples are listed at the right.

Sample Exchange List		
Food group	You can have.....	Or exchange it for...
<b>Fruit</b> (Each serving contains about 15 grams carbohydrates)	1 small or medium piece of fresh fruit	1/2 cup fruit juice, or canned or chopped fruit
<b>Vegetable</b> (Each serving contains about 5 grams carbohydrates)	1 cup raw vegetables	1/2 cup cooked vegetables or vegetable juice
<b>Starch</b> (Each serving contains about 15 grams carbohydrates)	1 slice or ounce bread	1/2 cup pasta, cereal, starchy vegetable
<b>Sugar, honey, molasses</b>	1 teaspoon	4 grams carbohydrates
<b>Milk</b> (does not include cream, yogurt or cheese)	1 cup milk	12 grams carbohydrates and 8 grams protein
<b>Meat</b>	1 ounce meat, fish, poultry, cheese or yogurt	1/2 cup dried beans
<b>Fat</b> (includes nuts, seeds and small amounts of bacon & peanut butter)	1 teaspoon oil, butter or margarine	5 grams fat

## What if my blood sugar is below or above normal?

If your blood sugar is low, you may become cranky, tired, confused, shaky or sweaty. This is a condition called hypoglycemia. This can happen after you have been working hard or exercising. You should check your blood sugar level and then drink fruit juice or a regular (not diet) soda right away. This will usually bring your level back to normal.

However, if you are very thirsty, urinate a lot or have blurred vision, your blood sugar may be much too high. Check your blood sugar level and contact your doctor to find out what to do.

## Other Organizations

American Dietetic Association  
<http://www.eatright.org>  
800-366-1655

American Diabetes Association  
<http://www.diabetes.org/home.jsp>

800-342-2383

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This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.

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