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## Diabetes

### Dietary Advice

- Type 1
- Type 2

# Diabetes — *Dietary Advice*

## **Type 1 Diabetes**

The dietary advice generally given to people with type 1 diabetes is not much different to the dietary advice for people without diabetes.

The main issues to consider are how sharply different foods are likely to impact on your blood glucose levels and how to balance the quantity of carbohydrate with the right amount of insulin.

## **Carbohydrate counting**

Carbohydrate counting plays a key role in helping to balance insulin intake with the food you eat.

A number of carbohydrate counting courses are available including the DAFNE Course (dose adjustment for normal eating) which is widely recommended by people who have been on it.

Another carbohydrate counting resource which is quickly growing in popularity is the Carbs and Cals book which shows, in pictorial form, how many carbohydrates are in a huge variety of different meals and portion sizes.

## **Healthy eating for type 1 diabetes**

Eating healthily comes highly recommended and can play a part in helping to prevent the development of complications.

Eating a balanced diet, containing a variety of different vegetables, will help to provide many nutrients that the body needs.

Try to include foods containing unsaturated fats such as nuts, avocados and oily fish.

We recommend limiting the amount of processed foods you eat and try to include home prepared or freshly prepared food wherever possible

### **Low carb diets and type 1 diabetes**

Some people with type 1 diabetes may wish to adopt a reduced carbohydrate diet. Low carb diets can be helpful for people who are struggling to keep control on a carb centered diet or for those who are otherwise looking to tighten their control.

One of the benefits of reducing your intake of carbohydrates is in reducing the extent of post meal high blood sugar levels.

Lower carb diets will require a reduction in insulin and could result in hypoglycemia if doses are not changed correctly. It is recommended to speak to your doctor before going onto a significantly different diet.

### **Type 2 Diabetes**

Diets for type 2 diabetes should be built around the principles of healthy eating with a focus on foods that do not adversely affect blood glucose levels.

As a general guide, a diet that includes a good variety of vegetables, a good source of unsaturated fats such as in nuts, avocados and oily fish and focuses on unprocessed foods is a good start.

### **Type 2 diabetes and the NHS diet**

The diet advice that is generally given out by the NHS is to include starchy carbohydrates with each meal, eat more fruit and vegetables, to eat at least 2 portions of oily fish a week and to cut down on saturated fat, salt and sugars.

The most disputed part of the advice is over the recommendation to eat starchy carbohydrates at each meal.

Many people with type 2 diabetes find that even low GI sources of starchy carbohydrate (such as basmati rice and whole grain bread) tend to significantly increase blood glucose levels

People should do blood glucose tests before and 2 hours after meals to see which foods, and in what quantities, are appropriate for them

## **Low carb diets and type 2 diabetes**

Low carbohydrate diets tend to be popular with people with type 2 diabetes, with many people reporting improved blood glucose levels on a low carb diet, and it can help to reduce dependency on medication. Low carbohydrate diets, despite their popularity and apparent effectiveness, have yet to be endorsed by the NHS. Read more about low carb diets and NHS recommendations.

People who are taking medication for type 2 diabetes should be aware that low carb diets could raise the likelihood of hypoglycemia so it's recommended to speak with your doctor before starting such a diet.

## **Drinks and Diabetes - What can I drink?**

When choosing what to drink, there are a couple of main considerations relevant to your diabetes to take into account.

The first consideration is whether, or how much, the drink will affect your blood sugar levels.

The other main consideration, which will be relevant to all of us to some degree but of particular relevance for those of us watching our weight, is to consider the calorie content of drinks.

**Water**—You can't go too far wrong with pure water. It provides the hydration your body needs and is, of course, zero carbohydrate and zero calories

**Milk** — Moderate carbohydrate content which may need to be accounted for, particularly in people with type 1 diabetes, if drinking close to or more than 100ml.

Milk tends to be a good source of energy and people that wish to watch their weight will need to take into account the calorie content of milk. Skimmed tends to have around half the calories of whole milk.

**Fruit juice** —Fruit juice is usually regarded as a healthy option but it should be noted that fruit juices have a relatively high carbohydrate content. The calorie content of fruit juice is similar to that of skimmed milk. Despite being quite high in carbohydrate content, fruit juice needn't be totally avoided and can be a good option before taking a sustained period of exercise as the

activity may help to balance out the rise in blood sugar levels from the juice.

**Fruit squash and cordials** — Fruit squash and cordials tend to be sweetened but some sugar free versions may be available. Squash and cordials don't carry the nutritional benefits of real fruit juice but can be a lower carbohydrate and lower calorie alternative to sugar soft drinks.

**Sugary soft drinks** — Sugary soft drinks are high in both carbohydrate and calories and generally contain no nutritional value aside from energy, which can lead to taking in more energy than the body needs, or leading to not taking in enough vitamins and minerals. Sugary soft drinks are generally best avoided but can be useful if you specifically need to raise your blood glucose levels, such as before, during or after exercise or to help treat a hypo.

**Diet soft drinks** — Diet soft drinks tend to be popular with people with diabetes as they are low in carbohydrate and low in calories.

Diet soft drinks tend to use artificial sweeteners and other artificial agents to provide sweetness, flavour and colour. Whilst soft drinks are recognised as safe for consumption, research has raised some questions over potential health issues and some people may prefer to limit or avoid their exposure to soft drinks as a precaution.

**Tea** — Research into the effects of non-milky tea has identified a range of health benefits, including improving insulin sensitivity and helping maintain healthy blood pressure. Lovers of milk in tea will be disappointed to know that the health benefits generally aren't realised when milk is added to tea.

**Coffee**—There are probably few foods or drinks that get such a mixture of good and bad headlines as coffee. Confusingly, coffee has been linked with both increased and decreased risks of developing type 2 diabetes.

Studies looking into moderate coffee consumption (2-3 cups a day) have shown some health benefits, including a lower risk of type 2 diabetes, whilst high coffee consumption (5 or more cups a day) has been linked with a higher risk.

Note that milky coffees such as lattes can be high in calories, with larger lattes sometimes varying between 100 and 300 calories.

**Sugar in hot drinks**—Many people enjoy sugar in hot drinks but people with diabetes are better off having drinks without sugar where possible as one or two teaspoons of sugar in each drink can add up over the course of a day.

2 spoons of sugar in 5 hot drinks a day is as much calories and carbohydrate as a can of full sugar cola.

**Alcoholic drinks**— When having alcohol, there are a few things to consider:

- How the drink will affect blood sugar levels
- The calorie content of the drink
- Whether alcohol will interact with any medication you take

Alcoholic drinks can be responsible for raising and lowering blood glucose levels so it's useful to understand how different alcoholic drinks can affect your sugar levels.

For those keeping an eye on their weight, it's important to note that alcohol is significant source of calories. For example, a single pint of regular beer has 200 calories, which is as many calories as a large slice of pizza.

Some medications interact with alcohol. It is advisable to check the patient information leaflet enclosed with your medication and consult your doctor if you have further questions.

### **Diabetes Nutrition**

Nutrition is a critical part of diabetes care. Balancing the right amount of carbohydrates, fat, protein along with fibre, vitamins and minerals helps us to maintain a healthy diet and a healthy lifestyle. Getting the balance right can help the body to stay in prime condition. For people with diabetes, there is at least one extra consideration for our nutritional needs and that is the question of how our blood sugar levels will respond to different diets.

## **Macronutrients**

The macronutrients referred to in human diets are the three food groups that provide us with energy, namely: carbohydrates, fat and protein. The three major nutrients are more than simply providers of fuel for our bodies. Fats and protein are both vital for building cells and helping the cells carry out their duties. Each of the macronutrients are versatile allowing the body to break them down into a number of uses.

Carbohydrate can be stored as fat and fat and protein can both be converted into glucose for example.

## **Micronutrients**

Micro may mean small, but micronutrients are far from insignificant. Without a regular supply of micronutrients, our bodies would literally starve. Micronutrients include all vitamins and minerals we take it in, often without realising, and are an essential part of a diabetic diet.

As an example, celery contains well over a dozen different micronutrients including a number of vitamins, potassium, calcium, iron and more.

If you feel you may be missing out on any particular nutrients, you can arrange to speak with a dietitian who will be happy to discuss your dietary needs.

## **Don't forget dietary fibre**

Last but not least, there's also fibre which helps to move food through our digestive system, can help to delay the absorption of carbohydrate and also help us to feel full.

## Useful Information

Your GP can now refer you for a free 12 week programme with Weight Watchers. For more information please contact the surgery.

Community Dieticians—You can be referred to see a community dietician at a local health centre. For more information please contact the surgery.

### **Useful Websites:**

[www.carbsandcals.com](http://www.carbsandcals.com)

[www.diabetes.co.uk](http://www.diabetes.co.uk)

[www.diabetes.org.uk](http://www.diabetes.org.uk)

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)