

# Healthy eating for people who have diabetes

**The diet recommended for people who have diabetes is no different from the healthy diet recommended for everyone**

If you have diabetes, you should be able to continue enjoying a wide variety of different foods as part of a healthy balanced diet.

**Try to be more active.** A balanced diet combined with regular physical activity will help you control your weight, which will in turn help reduce your blood glucose levels and risk of diabetes complications.

## Steps to a healthier diet:

### 1. Eat regular meals based on starchy foods such as bread, breakfast cereals, pasta, potatoes, and rice

- **Choose starchy foods** as the main part of each meal.
- **Spread your meals** throughout the day to help control your blood glucose levels.
- **Snacks between meals and at bedtime might be required** if you are on some insulins or diabetes tablets. To avoid gaining weight, try to take these from your usual diet rather than having extra food. For example, you could take a yoghurt from your usual midday meal and have it mid-morning instead.
- **Good examples of snacks** are a piece of fruit, low-fat yoghurt or two low-fat biscuits such as garibaldi or rich tea.

### 2. Eat less fat, particularly saturated fat

Eating less fat of any kind will help you lose weight, which will help reduce your blood glucose levels. You can reduce the total fat in your diet by the following:

- **Choose low-fat dairy products** such as semi-skimmed milk and half-fat cheeses.
- **Choose lean red meat**, or poultry without skin.
- **Grill, steam, or oven bake** rather than fry food.
- **Choose healthier snacks** such as fruit, low-fat yoghurt and lower fat biscuits such as rich tea or garibaldi instead of high-fat snacks (such as crisps, cakes and biscuits).

**The type of fat** you choose is also important:

- **Eat less saturated fat** (eg those found in meat, dairy food, most cakes, biscuits and take-away foods) because this type of fat raises cholesterol and, therefore, increases your risk of heart disease.
- **Use modest amounts of unsaturated fats** instead of saturated ones. These include polyunsaturated (eg sunflower oil and spreads, corn oil) and monounsaturated fats (eg olive oil and olive oil-based spreads, rapeseed oil). Both are known to be better for cholesterol levels and, therefore, can help reduce your risk of heart disease. Monounsaturated fats, however, remain the best choice for people who have diabetes.

### 3. Eat plenty of fruit and vegetables

Eating plenty of fruit and vegetables can help protect you against heart disease and other common conditions.

**Aim to have five portions of fruit and vegetables each day**

- **A portion of fruit and vegetables** is:  
One piece of (medium-sized) fruit (eg apple, banana or pear) or  
Two small fruits (eg satsumas, apricots) or  
One cupful of grapes or berries or  
One bowl of salad or  
Three tablespoons of vegetables
- **Fruit juice** contains a lot of natural sugar and, therefore, if drunk in large amounts can cause your blood glucose levels to rise. Try to limit your intake of fruit juice to one glass each day. To quench your thirst, it is better to drink water, diet canned drinks or no-added-sugar squash.

#### 4. Cut down on your total sugar

We now know that people who have diabetes don't have to avoid sugar entirely. You can have small amounts of sugar in your diet without upsetting your overall diabetes control for example.

- **Have a 'scraping'** of ordinary jam, honey or marmalade on your toast
- **Use small amounts of sugar** in low-fat desserts, cakes or biscuits.
- **Don't be afraid of sugars in low-fat savoury foods:** the sugars in baked beans, tomato sauce, pickles and chutney are usually present in small amounts and are unlikely to affect blood glucose levels.

**Avoid 'diabetic products':** they are often high in calories and fat and are expensive. Choose your favourite foods in small amounts on special occasions instead.

- **Avoid foods that are entirely based on sugar.** These include 'ordinary' squashes, cordials, fizzy drinks, sugar-coated cereals and sweets.
- **Choose diet or low-calorie** fizzy drinks, or no-added-sugar squashes that are based on artificial sweeteners (eg Canderel, Hermesetas or Splenda).

#### 5. Use less salt

High blood pressure can lead to an increased risk of coronary heart disease and stroke. Reducing salt (sodium) intake can help reduce high blood pressure. The majority of salt in our diet comes from packaged foods, not what we add ourselves. To reduce the salt in your diet:

- Prepare your own meals using fresh ingredients – you will know what is in them.
- Reduce the salt you add when you are cooking or at the table.

#### 6. Limit your alcohol intake

Excessive amounts of alcohol can increase the risk of developing heart disease and certain types of cancers.

- Like everyone else, people who have diabetes are advised that if they drink alcohol, it is best to drink it only in moderation. This means a limit of three units each day for men and two units each day for women. For further information see *Alcohol and diabetes*.

#### For further information contact:

- **Diabetes UK:** 10 Parkway, London NW1 7AA; Careline 0845 1202 960; [www.diabetes.org.uk](http://www.diabetes.org.uk)
- **Your GP:**
- **Your nurse:**
- **Your dietitian:**