Eating well with diabetes
Introduction

Balancing your diet when you are diagnosed with diabetes can be challenging. Although food choice and eating habits are important in helping you manage your diabetes, you should be able to continue enjoying a wide variety of foods as part of healthy eating.

Diabetes mellitus is a condition in which the amount of glucose (sugar) in the blood is too high because the body cannot use it properly. Glucose comes from the digestion of starchy foods such as bread, pasta, rice, chapatis, yams, plantain and potatoes, from sugar and other sweet foods and from the liver which makes glucose.

Eating a balanced diet, managing your weight, keeping active together with taking any prescribed medication and monitoring regularly, will help you control your diabetes.

Following the steps in this leaflet will help you control your blood glucose levels, blood fats and blood pressure, as well as regulate your weight.

Diabetes UK recommends that everyone with diabetes should see a state registered dietitian at diagnosis, and have regular reviews for specific advice on their eating habits.
Eight steps to eating well

1. Eat regular meals based on starchy carbohydrate foods – such as bread, pasta, chapatis, potatoes, yam, noodles, rice and cereals. This will help you to control your blood glucose levels. All varieties are fine, but try to include more of the wholegrain ones. These are high in fibre, helping to maintain the health of your digestive system and prevent problems such as constipation.

2. Cut down on the fat you eat – particularly saturated (animal) fats, as this type of fat is linked to heart disease. Choose monounsaturated fats, eg olive oil and rapeseed oil. Eating less fat and fatty foods will help you to lose weight. Use less butter, margarine, cheese and fatty meats. Choose low-fat dairy foods such as skimmed milk and low-fat yogurt. Grill, steam or oven bake instead of frying or cooking with oil or other fats.

3. Eat more fruit and vegetables – and aim for at least five servings a day to provide you with vitamins and fibre as well as to help you balance your overall diet. A portion is for example, a whole banana or apple, a slice of melon, 2 plums, a handful of grapes, a cereal bowl of salad or 3 heaped tablespoons of vegetables.
4 Limit sugar and sugary foods – this does not mean you need to eat a sugar-free diet. Sugar can be used in foods and in baking as part of a healthy diet. However, use sugar-free, low sugar or diet squashes and fizzy drinks, as sugary drinks cause blood glucose levels to rise quickly.

5 Use less salt – because a high intake of salt can raise your blood pressure. Try flavouring foods with herbs and spices instead of salt.

6 Drink alcohol in moderation only – that’s two units of alcohol per day for a woman and three units per day for a man. For example, a small glass of wine or half a pint of normal strength beer is about one unit. Never drink on an empty stomach, as alcohol can make hypoglycaemia (low blood glucose levels) more likely to occur.

7 Losing weight – if you are overweight, losing weight will help you control your diabetes and will also reduce your risk of heart disease, high blood pressure and stroke. Lose weight slowly over time (1–2 lbs per week) rather than crash dieting and try to be more active. Even if you don’t manage your ideal weight, losing a small amount and keeping it off will help your blood glucose and blood pressure control and improve your overall health.

8 Don’t be tempted by diabetic foods or drinks – they are expensive, unnecessary and have no added benefit for people with diabetes.
Meal plans
Eating for diabetes isn’t about going on a diet. It’s about making small, healthy changes to make your eating habits more balanced. One or two high fat or high sugar foods won’t undo the good work.

Your dietitian can advise on the right amount of food for you.

As a guide, each day, adults need:

Two servings of protein foods such as lean meat, fish, eggs, beans and vegetarian alternatives. This should be the smallest section on your plate.

At least five servings of starchy carbohydrate food including some at each meal such as bread, chapatis, yam, pasta, noodles, rice or potatoes. Include some of this at each meal.

At least five servings of fruit and vegetables. An example serving is one apple or one banana (see page 3 for more examples). Include plenty of all these foods.

Three servings of dairy foods such as low-fat milk, yogurt or cheese. Try to choose low fat versions of milk and dairy foods as too much of any fat can lead to weight gain and affect your diabetes control.
Trying to lose weight

- Meat, fish, beans
- Rice, pasta, potato
- Vegetables

Weight maintenance

- Rice, pasta, potato
- Meat, fish, eggs, beans, cheese
- Vegetables
Join Diabetes UK

Membership of Diabetes UK gives you:

- A bi-monthly members magazine, *Balance*, packed with news and information
- A wide range of booklets designed to give you the information you need to lead a full and healthy life
- Diabetes UK Careline for confidential support and information
  Freephone: 0845 120 2960
  Textphone: 020 7424 1031 (during office hours)
- Over 400 Diabetes UK groups across the country who offer support and a chance to meet other local people with diabetes
- Diabetes UK Services insurance and financial products designed to meet the needs of people with diabetes
- The opportunity to help yourself and others with diabetes in the UK.

To become a member of Diabetes UK simply complete the attached form and send it to:

Diabetes UK, Freepost NH2604, Northampton NN3 6BR.

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