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Eating Well with Diabetes is one of a series of companion guides for people with diabetes, which are available in printed and digital forms (from Apple, Android and Kindle Fire app stores). Other guides are available for parents of children with Type 1 diabetes, and adults with Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes.

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* Mon-Fri 9am-7pm. The cost of calling 0345 numbers can vary according to the provider. Calls may be recorded for quality and training purposes.
No food is out of bounds but food choices are an important part of your diabetes management.
Food groups

The foods you choose are an important part of your diabetes treatment, just like taking your medication, testing blood glucose and being active. It's fine to have a treat every now and again – it's about getting the balance right. Food can be divided into five groups:

1 STARCHY FOODS
Potatoes, rice, pasta, bread, chapattis, naan and plantain all contain carbohydrate, which is broken down into glucose and used by your cells as fuel. Choose carbohydrates that are more slowly absorbed (that is, lower GI, see page 13) as they will keep your blood glucose levels more even and keep you feeling fuller for longer. Starchy foods are naturally low in fat and high-fibre choices (wholemeal and wholegrain options) will also help keep your bowels regular, preventing digestive disorders.

How much per day?
Aim for 5–14 portions. One-third of your diet should be made up of these foods, so try to include them in every meal.

2 FRUIT AND VEGETABLES
Fruits and vegetables are naturally low in fat and calories, while being packed with vitamins, minerals and fibre. They can help protect against stroke, heart disease, high blood pressure and certain cancers.

How much per day?
Aim for at least 5 portions. Fresh, frozen, dried and tinned fruit and vegetables all count. Aim for a mix of colours to get as wide a range of vitamins and minerals as possible.

What's a portion?
A handful of grapes; a tbsp of dried fruit; a small glass of unsweetened 100% fruit juice or smoothie; 3 tbsp of vegetables; a piece of fruit, like a banana or apple.

3 DAIRY PRODUCTS
Milk, cheese and yogurt contain calcium, which helps to keep your bones and teeth strong. They are also a good source of protein, but some can be high in fat, so choose lower-fat alternatives where you can (but look out for added sugar in its place).

How much per day?
Aim for 3 portions.

What's a portion?
One portion is equal to: 190ml (⅓ pint) of milk; a small pot of yogurt; 2 tbsp cottage cheese; a matchbox-sized portion of cheese (45g/1½ oz).

4 MEAT, FISH, EGGS AND PULSES
These foods are high in protein, which is needed for building and replacing muscle cells in the body. They also contain minerals, such as iron, which are needed for producing red blood cells. Omega-3 fish oils, found in oily fish, such as mackerel, salmon and sardines, can help to protect the heart. Good sources of protein for vegetarians include beans, pulses, lentils, soya and tofu.
How much per day?
Aim for 2–3 portions.

What's a portion?
One portion is equal to: 60–85g (2–3oz) meat, poultry or vegetarian alternative; 120–140g (4–5oz) fish; 2 eggs; 2 tbsp nuts.

5 FOODS HIGH IN FAT AND SUGAR
Technically, your body doesn't need any foods in this group, but eating them in moderation can be part of a healthy, balanced diet. Sugary foods and drinks will raise your blood glucose, so opt for diet/light or low-calorie alternatives.

It's also worth remembering that fat is high in calories, so try to reduce the amount of oil you use in your cooking and choose lower-fat alternatives wherever possible.

How much per day?
Aim for 0–4 portions (the fewer the better).

What's a portion?
One portion is equal to: 2 tsp spread, butter, oil, salad dressing, sugar, jam or honey; 1 tbsp Bombay mix; rasher of bacon; 1/3 of a vegetable samosa; 1 mini chocolate bar; 1 scoop of ice cream or 1 tbsp cream.

ADDING SEASONING
Eating too much salt (6g/0.2oz or more per day) can raise your blood pressure, which can lead to stroke and heart disease. Try to eat less processed foods and cook more meals from scratch, flavouring foods with herbs and spices instead of salt.

The number of portions for each food group varies from person to person and these are given as a guide. Your dietitian will be able to tell you how much you should eat.
Tips for a balanced diet

1 EAT REGULAR MEALS
Spacing meals evenly will help control your appetite and blood glucose levels – especially if you are on twice-daily insulin.

2 INCLUDE STARCHY CARBOHYDRATES
Include starchy carbohydrates in your diet. Carbohydrate (carbs) affects blood glucose levels, so be conscious of how much you eat and go for carbs that are more slowly absorbed. Try:
- pasta or basmati or easy-cook rice
- granary, pumpernickel or rye breads
- new potatoes, sweet potatoes and yams
- oat-based cereals, such as porridge or natural muesli.

3 CUT THE FAT
In particular, cut saturated fat. Try:
- unsaturated fats and oils, especially mono-unsaturated fats like extra virgin olive oil and rapeseed oil
- using skimmed or semi skimmed milk and other low-fat dairy food
- grilling, steaming or baking foods instead of frying.

4 TRY TO EAT FIVE A DAY
Aim for at least five portions of fruit or vegetables every day to give your body all the vitamins, minerals and fibre it needs. One portion is:
- 1 piece of fruit, like a banana
- 1 handful of grapes
- 1 small glass of fruit juice
- 3 heaped tbsp vegetables.

5 EAT PLENTY OF BEANS
Beans, lentils and pulses are all low in fat, high in fibre and cheap to buy. They don't have a big impact on blood glucose and may help to control blood fats such as cholesterol. Try kidney beans, chickpeas, green lentils, and even baked beans:
- hot in soups and casseroles
- cold in salads
- in baked falafel, bean burgers and low-fat hummus and dhals.

Aim to have two meat-free meals each week.

6 EAT MORE FISH
All types of fish are healthy provided they're not fried or coated in batter, but oily fish, such as mackerel, sardines, salmon and trout, are particularly good for you. They are rich in Omega-3 (polyunsaturated fat). Aim to eat two portions of oily fish a week.
7 CUT BACK ON SUGAR
You can include some sugar in foods and baking in a healthy, balanced diet, provided you don’t overdo it. You can also use sweeteners as an alternative to sugar. Some easy ways to cut back are:
- choosing sugar-free, no-added sugar or diet/light drinks
- buying canned fruit in juice
- reducing or cutting out sugar in tea and coffee.

Remember, sugary drinks are an excellent treatment for hypos.

8 REDUCE YOUR SALT
Too much salt can raise your blood pressure, which increases your risk of heart disease and stroke. Reduce salt in your diet to 6g or less a day. Try:
- cutting back on processed foods, which account for 70 per cent of our salt intake.
- flavouring foods with herbs and spices instead of salt.

9 DRINK SENSIBLY
The recommended daily alcohol limit for women is 2–3 units and 3–4 units for men. Remember:
- 1 unit is a single measure (25ml) of spirits, 1/2 pint (284ml) of lager, beer or cider or 1/2 175ml glass of wine.
- Alcohol is high in calories. To lose weight, consider cutting back.
- Never drink on an empty stomach as alcohol can make hypos more likely to happen, if you are at risk of hypos.

10 AVOID ‘DIABETIC FOODS’
These products offer no benefit to people with diabetes and may still affect your blood glucose levels. They are expensive and can have a laxative effect.