

Healthy lifestyle for people with diabetes

Building healthy eating habits, regular activity, maintaining your best weight, working with a nutritionist, and learning what works for you all play a role in diabetes control.

The food you eat turns into energy your body needs to function. The digestion process breaks down food into glucose (known as blood sugar) and moves it into your bloodstream. Then the hormone insulin (made by your pancreas) helps take the glucose out of your blood and put it into your cells, where it is used for energy.

When you have type 2 diabetes, your pancreas either cannot make enough insulin to control your blood sugar level, or the insulin that your pancreas makes cannot get into the cells (the term for this is "insulin resistance"). Both cause too much glucose in your bloodstream, which can cause problems in your body. In the short-term, symptoms can include excessive thirst and urination. In the long-term, high blood sugar can damage your blood vessels, and cause other health problems.

When you have diabetes, it's important to do everything you can to manage your blood sugar and stay as healthy as possible. The following habits will each have a big impact on your health and how you feel each day:

- Lose weight or maintain your best weight.
- Get some exercise or be physically active every day.
- Develop good eating habits.

Lose weight or maintain your best weight

Losing 5-10% of your body weight can help reduce insulin resistance and decrease blood glucose levels. To lose weight and keep it off:

- Avoid foods that are high in calories and sugar (or limit them to small portions, consumed infrequently).
- Choose foods in their natural state, instead of processed or packaged food.
- Avoid foods that are high in saturated fat or have trans fat (no amount is healthy).
- Drink water or seltzer instead of drinks with sugar (including soda, sports drinks, fruit juice, even 100% fruit juice).
- Increase fiber intake.
- Get daily activity.

Be active

Regular exercise can make your cells better at using insulin, decrease blood glucose levels, and help keep weight stable.

- Aim for 35 minutes of exercise, such as fast walking, at least 5 times per week.
- Start by exercising 10-15 minutes at a time and increase to 30 minutes.
- If you must sit for long periods of time, get up and move around at least every 90 minutes.
- Be sure to let your clinician know before you start any new exercise program.

Develop good eating habits

Your goal is to eat real food—food that your grandparents would recognize! You may not have to give up all less-healthy foods—just enjoy them less frequently and in moderation.

Every day

- Eat at regular times. Don't go longer than 5 hours without eating. Letting yourself get too hungry can lead to unhealthy food choices.
- Learn to read labels. Once you know about the nutrients in your favorite foods, you can make good choices for yourself.

Eat a variety of real, whole foods

- A balanced diet promotes good health.
- Choose whole foods from the major food groups.
- Avoid foods that are packaged or processed.
- Eat whole fruit instead of drinking fruit juice, which is very high in sugar.

Create a balanced, healthy plate at meals

- Eat the rainbow! At least $\frac{1}{2}$ of your plate should be vegetables or salads.
- Carbohydrates should make up no more than $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate. Choose whole-grain carbs whenever possible.
- Protein such as poultry, fish, lean meats, beans, or tofu should also make up about $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate.

Limit or avoid foods with added sugar

Sugar in food and sugar-sweetened beverages can raise blood glucose levels and contribute to weight gain.

- Read labels: sugar is known by many different names, including honey, high-fructose corn syrup, agave, molasses, maple syrup, and more.
- Limit foods with added sugar, like sweets, desserts, candy, and beverages; many salad dressings and ketchups have sugar.
- Limit intake of alcohol and drinks with sugar, including soda, sports drinks, and juices. Choose water or seltzer instead.
- Limit juice intake to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (4 ounces) per day and drink it with a meal or snack only.

Increase fiber intake

Fiber can help control blood glucose levels after meals and may also help you feel full, longer. Choose:

- Vegetables and fruits.
- Legumes (dried beans and peas) like lentils, chick peas, black beans.
- Whole grains, like rice, barley, farro.
- Whole-grain bread, bran, and whole-grain cereals.

Eat less saturated fat and more healthy fat

- Eat healthy fats, like olive or grapeseed oil, avocados, and nuts.
- Limit red meat (steak, hamburgers) and trim fat before cooking.

- Choose low-fat dairy products like milk, yogurt, and cheese.
- Bake, broil, roast, grill, or steam foods. Avoid frying.

Work with a dietitian

A Partners dietitian can help you come up with a plan that includes your favorite foods and keeps your carbohydrate intake at an appropriate level. Ask your provider whether you need to count carbohydrates.

Keep a food diary

Evidence shows that people who track their food intake make better choices and lose more weight than those who don't.

- Write everything you eat in a notebook.
- Use an app (if you have a smartphone) to track food and count calories and/or carbs: Glooko, Health2Sync, Glucosio, Calorie Counter, Diabetes Tracker, mySugr, BG Monitor, Beat O, Glucose Buddy, DiabetesConnect.

Patient Care Advice (PCOI) documents are available under **Resources** on your Patient Gateway home page.

This document is not a substitute for your care team's medical advice and should not be relied upon for treatment for specific medical conditions.

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