

# The Diabetic's Guide to **Healthy** And **Delicious** Eating



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## Introduction

Diabetes mellitus is one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality worldwide. In spite of growing awareness of this disease, cases of DM worldwide is still rising. Furthermore, the average age of those being diagnosed with this disease is getting lower, meaning younger people are now becoming diabetics. It's a fact that people's diets play a factor in increasing one's susceptibility of developing this disease. On that same note, diet can be used to prevent and manage diabetes. How to eat your way out of diabetes? Here are some of the things you should know.

## The Role of Food in Diabetes

While hereditary factors and level of physical activity are 2 factors that play a major role in determining a patient's risk of developing diabetes, dietary factors are considered by many as the primary cause of its development. With more people becoming obese (and does so at a much earlier age), unhealthy dietary practices have been linked to the development of diabetes more than ever before. An emphasis on high-carbohydrate diets combined with the use of high-fructose sweeteners have increased both obesity and insulin resistance, 2 hallmark features of type 2 diabetes.

If your diet has an integral role in a patient's risk for developing diabetes (more specifically type 2), your diet also plays an integral role in managing and possibly correcting it. Eating the right food at the right intervals will help maintain your blood sugar at safe levels. The benefits of controlling diabetes through your diet are numerous. It will help you have higher and better sustained energy throughout the day, it will reduce your dependence on medications, and possibly reverse the insulin

resistance associated with your diabetes. Done the right way, food will help manage diabetes best.

There are some food items that will prove beneficial for diabetics. From eliminating excess weight to preventing complications associated with diabetes, these foods will help improve your overall state of health. Conversely, if there are foods recommended for diabetics, there are some items that should be avoided if you are dealing with diabetes. Aside from the food themselves, how they are prepared and eaten has an impact if such foods will help or hurt your diet. Lastly, the manner in which you eat can manage your diabetic symptoms and keep your blood sugar levels under control.

## A Look at Macronutrients

If you want to use food as your means to overcome diabetes, you have to modify your approach towards eating. The first step to doing that is by eating food that will actually help you if you are a diabetic. While there is no real diet to follow

for diabetics, it is important to get complete nutrition. It is also essential that you manage both the derangements associated with diabetes and correct the risk factors that are amplifying insulin resistance. You do these 2, and you get into a better position to becoming diabetes-free.

Here is a look at the macronutrients, what they do to your body, and how you consume them could affect your status as a diabetic.

1. **Carbohydrates** - As a disease that mainly affects sugar metabolism, carbohydrates deservedly get much of the attention when management of diabetes is concerned. Found in just about every type of food, from fruits to grains to sweets, carbohydrates are responsible for providing energy for your body. They are broken down in your body to glucose, which is then being utilized by your body as fuel. Excess glucose is then transformed into fat for storage purposes. If glucose is lacking, then the body will break down fat to transform it into glucose.

When a person has diabetes, their normal ability to utilize carbohydrates is compromised. Because of lack of insulin and/or insulin resistance, blood sugar tends to elevate much faster, which can then result to hyperglycemia and most of the complications associated with diabetes. It's a common misconception that diabetics should avoid consuming food containing carbohydrates at all costs. Even for diabetics, there is a need for glucose that should be satisfied. This is why you should still consume carbohydrate sources. However, a different approach to eating carb sources is a must.

An emphasis on consuming carbs from healthy sources is important when you are dealing with carbohydrates. You would rather get your sugar fix from nutritious sources than those that aren't, as they would be nothing more than empty calories. Also, you would like to add more complex carbohydrates to your diet. These carbs do not cause rapid blood glucose swings associated with simpler carbohydrates

associated with most processed foods, and they are more effective in keeping your blood glucose stable (and your energy high) throughout the day.

2. **Proteins** - While protein does not have a direct effect on increasing or decreasing blood sugar levels, it does have a major effect on your digestive functions. Since protein is an integral part of each cell in your body (plus it also plays a number of important roles in multiple bodily functions), you need to have regular protein intake. You would need to satisfy your protein needs to make sure you won't fall prey to metabolic and nutritional imbalances that are prominent in diabetes. Of course, being a diabetic, you need to be much smarter in terms of your choices for a protein source.

One of the best reasons why you need to add protein in your diet as a diabetic is because of its effects in metabolism. They tend to be digested a little longer, creating satiety and prevents the hunger swings associated with



being a diabetic. Also, the protein in your diet can compensate for the losses created by the excessive breakdown of protein (from muscles) caused by diabetes. Last but not least, proteins also contain calories, so it can be an alternative source of energy when you are trying to cut down on carbs.

It is best to get your protein from high-quality sources. Seafood, lean meat, dairy products, nuts, and soy are some examples of healthy protein sources. Not only do they contain high-quality protein that is immediately absorbed by the body, but they also contain other nutrients that are beneficial for you. There are also vegan-friendly protein sources available, so those who don't eat meat for whatever reason need not worry. A visit to your nutritionist will help you find out how much protein you need daily. They will consider factors such as your age, body weight, and the condition of your kidneys.

3. **Fats** - Fats are perhaps the most misunderstood nutrient of all. A lot of people have a negative

stigma for it because it is linked to a number of health problems such as heart disease. However, consuming certain types of fats, as well as cholesterol, is necessary to maintain a number of bodily functions. This is why the approach of avoiding fats altogether is not a good idea at all. So how do you consume fats, and how does your consumption of it change if you are a diabetic?

Fat is the most energy-dense macronutrient. To put things in perspective, one gram of fat contains 9 calories, compared to carbohydrates and protein that generate 4 calories per gram each. Aside from being an excellent source of energy, fat is also needed for synthesizing a number of substances essential for normal body functions such as hormones. Also, certain vitamins are fat-soluble, so a diet containing zero fat can cause malnutrition. Last but not least, consuming the right types of fat (specifically unsaturated fatty acids), you can reduce your risk of cardiovascular diseases and other ailments.

Just like with carbohydrates, consuming too much fat can actually worsen your diabetes problem. This is because excess fat consumption creates excess calories, which would then cause weight gain, which would then worsen your diabetes. So just like with carbohydrates, the technique with consuming fats when you are diabetic is ensuring that everything is within moderation. Beyond moderation, it is best to derive your daily fat intake from healthy sources. It is best to consume foods that are high in unsaturated fat, as well as high-density lipoprotein (HDL), also known as “good” cholesterol.

## **Foods You Should Eat If You're a Diabetic**

There are a number of foods that are highly recommended for consumption by diabetics. You cannot go wrong in including these foods as part of your diabetes diet. Their high nutritional value and lack of the excesses that cause harm to your body

makes them excellent choices for your diet. This list also includes some foods that are great for keeping your blood sugar under control.

1. **Fatty fish** - If you are looking for a healthy source of protein and fat, look no further. Fatty fish is one of the most ideal sources of both fat and protein, and they can be prepared in all kinds of way that is good for your body. Fish such as sardines, tuna, and salmon are rich in omega-3 fatty acids such as DHA and EPA, which are great for your cardiovascular health. They also have anti-inflammatory properties, which can help your immune function and further lessen your risk of heart disease. Also, it's a great source of protein. Having your daily dose of fatty fish can make you healthy in so many ways.
2. **Eggs** - Eggs have a strong reputation for being one of the best natural sources of protein out there. Beyond its high concentration of protein, it also contains a lot of good cholesterol, which as mentioned earlier has cardioprotective

properties. It also contains vitamins A and B, while also containing minerals such as folate, selenium, and zinc. While consuming eggs in moderation is still a must (eggs are still highly concentrated with cholesterol), there is no reason why you shouldn't include it in your diet. To enjoy its full nutritional benefits, eat both the yolk and white. Also, use cooking approaches that minimize the use of oil.

3. **Leafy green vegetables** - Our parents always used to say that we should eat our greens. If we have diabetes (or at least trying to prevent it), adding leafy green vegetables to your diet is a very good idea. They are highly nutritious, packed with vitamins and minerals with every bite. In addition to this, their high water content will help you stay hydrated and full for longer. They also contain dietary fiber that helps in keeping your digestion healthy. Last but not least, they contain very minimal calories! It would be a great idea to add leafy greens such as spinach or kale as your main meal or as a grain substitute.

4. **Greek yogurt** - Yogurt in general is good for your body, but Greek yogurt is specifically an excellent choice for diabetics. It is a great source of probiotics, which promotes good digestion and is said to have an effect in reducing insulin resistance. With regular consumption of Greek yogurt, you can also cut down on your weight, which helps in mitigating the effects of type 2 diabetes. It is also rich in calcium and conjugated linoleic acid which promotes overall health. If you will consume Greek yogurt, it is most recommended that you go for unflavored variants to lessen the sugar count.
  
5. **Nuts** - Nuts are a perfect snack alternative to chips and other unhealthy options. While their carbohydrate content is variable (but they are generally low), nuts have high levels of dietary fiber which helps in promoting good digestion. Nuts are also a healthy source of proteins and fats, making them a great option for those who are considering going for a vegan diet. Consuming enough nuts daily is directly linked to reduced insulin resistance, inflammatory

markers, and LDL cholesterol, which are all linked to a number of bodily ailments. Almonds, cashews, hazelnuts, and walnuts are just examples of nuts you can munch on.

6. **Broccoli** - Broccoli has earned the reputation of being one of the healthiest vegetables around. It has remarkably low caloric content: a half cup of broccoli only contains 27 calories and 3 grams of carbohydrates. It also contains high amounts of dietary fiber, as well as vitamin C and magnesium. To top things off, studies have shown that regular consumption of broccoli can help in reducing insulin resistance. It is also rich in lutein and zeaxanthin, which helps in preventing eye diseases, a common problem associated with diabetes.
7. **Apple cider vinegar** - This vinegar created from apples has become one of the most popular health foods out there. It is specifically effective for those suffering from diabetes, as it helps in improving insulin sensitivity and lowers fasting blood sugar levels. It also reduces blood sugar response after eating by up to 20%. It even helps

in increasing satiety levels, which helps you eat less, which would then help you lose excess weight. Daily consumption of 2 tablespoons of apple cider vinegar daily will help you enjoy all these health benefits.

8. **Garlic** - One of the most popular spices out there, garlic is also very helpful if you are trying to control your diabetes. A powerful anti-inflammatory, it is remarkably effective in preventing a wide range of diseases from heart disease to arthritis. It also controls blood sugar and cholesterol levels, which is very helpful for managing diabetes and its complications. It is also very effective in controlling blood pressure, a property that has been proven in a number of scientific trials. While garlic can be eaten at any state, its potency is believed to be at its highest when it's eaten raw.
  
9. **Flaxseed** - Considered as a superfood, flaxseed is a great food option for those who are suffering from diabetes. It contains high amounts of fiber, most specifically lignans,



which is directly linked to reducing blood cholesterol levels and improving insulin response. Studies have shown that patients who consumed flaxseed for 12 weeks have reduced HbA1C levels, a marker for control of blood sugar. Beyond its diabetes-specific benefits, flaxseed is also a good source of viscous fiber, which helps in improving digestion and creates a feeling of fullness.

10. **Cinnamon** - This popular spice is especially known for its antioxidant properties. These antioxidants remove free radicals and other inflammatory compounds that can contribute to the progression of diseases. Also, cinnamon is very effective for managing diabetes. It can both help reduce blood sugar levels and significantly improve insulin sensitivity. Combining these 2 properties makes it an ideal spice for diabetics. You can use cinnamon to add flavor and aroma to your dishes. While any type of cinnamon can be used by diabetics, Ceylon cinnamon is said to be the best.

Those are just some of the foods that you can add to your diet if you want to start a diabetes diet. Of course, the list doesn't end there, there are plenty of ingredients out there that will improve your overall health and/or help control your blood sugar. Make sure to explore your options or consult your nutritionist, dietician, and doctor for some expert advice. You can also read on recipes and food guides to know more about these healthy options.

## Food Preparation Is a Factor

Your doctor will tell you that the management of any kind of disease starts at home. This is especially so when it comes to diseases where diet plays a factor in both its development and progression. One such disease is diabetes mellitus. If you are trying to manage your diabetes with your diet, it is imperative that you improve how you prepare your food. This is because most of the meals you and your family eats are prepared

right at your home. Food preparation is a factor in creating a successful diet for diabetes, and you should do whatever it takes to prepare food that's great for your diet.

Just to warm you up to the prospect of preparing your own food (if you are not the type that lives in the kitchen), here are some of the advantages of preparing your own food. It is definitely the more economical option. Eating out, especially on food services that offer "healthy food", is a more expensive option. We believe that eating healthy means you'll have to overspend. Also, another advantage of preparing your own food is that you get full control of the ingredients, meaning you control both the nutritional value and taste of your food. Last but not least, nothing beats the satisfaction of preparing and eating your own food, especially if others get satisfied eating it!

Here are some food preparation tips that we can share so you can start creating healthy, diabetes-friendly food right at the comfort of your home.

- 1. Shop for your ingredients ahead of time -**  
One reason why some people become lazy in preparing their own food is because they lack an ingredient or two to prepare a dish they have in mind. For aspiring food preppers, it is best to shop for your ingredients ahead of time. A visit at your local market or grocery will help you see a lot of healthy ingredients you can use to prepare your kitchen creations. Creating a complementary meal plan together with your shopping list is optional but highly effective.
  
- 2. Consider alternative ingredients -** There are some ingredients readily available at the marketplace that are not exactly healthy or may even contribute to the worsening of your diabetes. As such, a look at alternative ingredient options will help in making your dishes as healthy as possible. For example, if you need some oil, instead of using solid options such as butter, choose instead liquid ones such as olive oil. Liquid fats generally contain less saturated fats than their solid counterparts. Also, if you need some carbs, it

would be wise to choose whole grains instead of refined ones, as you can add more dietary fiber and healthy carbs this way.

- 3. Add taste healthily** - Who says healthy food has to be bland? Chefs, nutritionists, and other food experts will disagree with you on this one. While adding sugar and salt to your dishes is just fine in moderation, too much of it can ruin the nutritional value of your food. Want to add more taste to your food without ruining its nutritional value? You can add herbs and spices to your meals. Oregano, basil, chili, and turmeric are just some examples of taste-adders that boosts the nutritional value of your dishes. For sweeteners, healthy sugar alternatives include natural honey and stevia.
- 4. Search for recipes** - You can find all kinds of recipes out there. Some of them are published in books, while others are posted at different confines of the internet. There are a lot of recipe makers out there that prepare appetizers, meals, snacks, and drinks that are compatible

with specific diets. A lot of these dishes tastes so good, that you won't even notice that it's made specifically for diabetics and others who are dealing with illness. Another advantage of seeing these recipes: it can give ideas on how you can improve or even create meals.

5. **Train yourself how to cook** - So what if you don't know how to cook? You can prepare meals at home even if you have zero kitchen skills. After all, even experts took some time to develop their skills. If you want to prep meals at your home, you need to train yourself how to cook. The good thing is that these are skills that can be developed. If you are passionate and interested enough in learning how to prepare healthy food, you will eventually get to the point that you can prepare these with ease. Of course, that would mean you'll have to set aside time and effort to prepare food, but it's all part of the experience.
6. **Some pre-cooked ingredients/dishes are actually okay** - Some people have tight schedules that make it more difficult for them

to prepare food for themselves and their family. This is why some people resort pre-cooked dishes and/or ingredients. While some of these products earned a negative rap because some of them are loaded with sodium and stripped of nutrients, some pre-cooked ingredients and dishes are actually great to include in your meal prep plan.

- 7. Pack and store food whenever appropriate -**  
Storing and packing food is a skill that every homemaker must have. When you cook something, there would always be leftovers. Proper storage of food will help minimize food wastage and provides a surplus of food you can tap into when you cannot cook. Different dishes have different ways of storage that will help retain their freshness for the longest possible time. Also, if you are the person who is always on the go, packing food for your trip will ensure you'll stick to your diet and help you save a ton of money.

8. **Get your family involved** - Dieting is best enjoyed when the whole family is involved. You can encourage your folks to join you in following a healthy diet, especially if you have a family history of diabetes. Beyond helping to improve the overall wellness of your family, getting your family involved will help making the preparation of meals more fun. It would be great if you get the kids involved in food prep so they can better appreciate the value of healthy home cooking and build the skills and discipline needed to become home dieters.

## Tips for Eating Out

Even as a diabetic, there would always come a time when you have to eat outside. After all, even as diabetics, we have lives to live, schedules to fulfill, and people to share memories with. Eating out doesn't have to be a nightmare for diabetics. As long as you know where to get your food and how to practice motivation, eating out need not be a torture for diabetics everywhere. Here are some tips we can share if you are planning to eat out.



1. **Eat in controlled proportions** - Sometimes, eating out the healthy way is all about eating the right proportions of food when you do eat out. Know the serving sizes of these restaurants and order accordingly. If you are not familiar with their serving size, just ask the server or order the smallest one available. If the meal proves to be too big, you can always share it with a companion or you can take it out for your next meal. Going to buffets is alright occasionally, but just make sure that you don't go beyond what your diet recommends.
2. **Know your alternatives** - One of the reasons why eating out is maligned by dieters is because their menu is filled with unhealthy options. However, if you are smart enough, you can always swap them out with healthier alternatives. There are side dishes such as french fries that are seriously unhealthy. However, there are healthier sides such as salads that you can swap it with. Some dips and dressings are notorious for having excessive calories and salt. Fortunately, these items also

have healthier alternatives, or you can remove them altogether.

- 3. Watch out for the extras** - A lot of meals have extras that make otherwise healthy food items unhealthy. For example, the addition of croutons, cheese, and chips can pad extra calories and carbs in your dish, making it more excess-laden than it should be. You can have these extras removed to have a leaner meal, or you can choose to still have these extras and enjoy your food with extra moderation. Knowing the ingredients that come with your food allows you to make better decisions when eating out.
- 4. Go for healthier food prep options** - Food is cooked in all kinds of ways, but some prep methods are healthier than others. For example, roasting, grilling, and steaming meat and vegetables are healthier than frying and breading them. There are also restaurants that allow customers to fine-tune their meals according to their tastes. Need your food to have less fat or salt than usual? Some chefs

would be more than happy to entertain your requests. Sometimes, all you need to do is ask.

5. **Indulge from time to time** - I know a lot of diabetics who have a fear of desserts and alcohol, 2 items commonly available when eating out and commonly availed when eating with family and friends. It is 100% okay to enjoy these indulgences from time to time, especially if you don't go out all the time. For dessert, healthy sweets such as fruits are your best option. It is okay to consume sweets such as cakes, but you can compensate for it by eating less carbs on your main dish. For alcohol, go for low-calorie options such as dry wine, light beers, pure liquor, and unsweetened mixes. Lastly, consume these items in moderation.

## Conclusion

Following a diet for diabetes need not be a dodgy and troublesome process. You can make your food as healthy as possible and compliant to your health needs without sacrificing either your food budget or your schedule flexibility. Include diabetes-friendly foods in your diet and follow the tips we shared here so you can enjoy a health, hassle-free diabetes diet experience.

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