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What to eat and avoid while on a 'diabetes diet'

A diet rich in vegetables, fruits, and lean proteins can benefit a person with diabetes. At the same time, a person with diabetes may need to limit their intake of white bread, sweets, and other highly refined foods.

Both sugary and starchy carbohydrates can raise blood sugar. But these foods, in the right amounts, can play a role in a balanced meal plan. The right amount and type of carbohydrates can depend on many factors, including a person's activity level and medications, such as insulin.

This article looks at some of the best foods for people with diabetes, which foods to limit, and how to ensure a balanced diet.

A note about sex and gender

Sex and gender exist on spectrums. This article will use the terms "male," "female," or both to refer to sex assigned at birth. [Learn more.](#)

Green, leafy vegetables

Green, leafy vegetables are a key plant-based source of potassium, vitamin A, and calcium. They also provide protein and fiber.

Some researchers have found that eating green, leafy vegetables can benefit people with diabetes due to these plants' high antioxidant and fiber content.

Green, leafy vegetables include:

spinach
collard greens
kale
cabbage
bok choy
broccoli

spinach

collard greens

kale

cabbage

bok choy

broccoli

Whole grains

Whole grains contain high levels of fiber and more nutrients than refined white grains.

Eating a diet high in fiber is important for people with diabetes because fiber slows the digestion process. Slower absorption of nutrients helps keep blood sugar stable.

Whole wheat and whole grains are lower on the glycemic index (GI) scale than white breads and rice. This means that they have less of an effect on blood sugar.

Good examples of whole grains to include in the diet are:

brown rice whole grain bread whole grain pasta buckwheat quinoa millet bulgur rye

brown rice

whole grain bread

whole grain pasta

buckwheat

quinoa

millet

bulgur

rye

Fatty fish

Fatty fish is a beneficial addition to any diet. It contains important omega-3 fatty acids called eicosapentaenoic acid and docosahexaenoic acid. These are sometimes known as EPA and DHA.

People need certain amounts of healthy fats to keep their body functioning and to promote heart and brain health.

The American Diabetes Association (ADA) reports that a Mediterranean diet, a dietary plan high in polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats may improve blood sugar management and blood lipids in people with diabetes.

Certain fish are a rich source of both polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats. These are:

salmon mackerel sardines albacore tuna herring trout

salmon

mackerel

sardines

albacore tuna

herring

trout

People can eat seaweeds, such as kelp and spirulina, as plant-based alternative sources of these fatty acids.

Beans

Beans are an excellent option for people with diabetes. They are a source of plant-based protein and can help satisfy the appetite while helping promote digestive health due to their high content of soluble fibers.

Beans are also low on the GI scale, which means they may be more effective for blood sugar management than many other starchy foods.

Among the many types of beans are:

kidney pinto black navy adzuki

kidney

pinto

black

navy

adzuki

Beans also contain important nutrients, including iron, potassium, and magnesium.

Learn more about beans and diabetes.

Walnuts

Nuts can be another excellent addition to the diet. As with fish, nuts contain fatty acids that help keep the heart healthy.

Walnuts are especially rich in a type of omega-3 called alpha-linolenic acid (ALA). As with other omega-3s, ALA is important for heart health. People with diabetes may have a higher risk of heart disease or stroke, so it is important to consume these fatty acids.

A study from 2021 suggested that eating walnuts has links with a lower incidence of diabetes.

Walnuts also provide key nutrients, such as protein, vitamin B6, magnesium, and iron.

Learn about other beneficial nuts for diabetes.

Citrus fruits

Eating these fruits can be an easy way to get vitamins and minerals. The ADA notes that citrus fruits, such as oranges, grapefruits, and lemons, can benefit people with diabetes.

Some researchers have found that citrus fruits are rich in many flavonoid antioxidants, such as hesperidin and naringin, which may exhibit antidiabetic effects.

Citrus fruits are also a great source of:

vitamin C, folate, potassium

vitamin C

folate

potassium

Learn about other beneficial fruits for diabetes.

Berries

Berries are full of antioxidants, which can help prevent oxidative stress. Oxidative stress has links with a wide range of health conditions, including heart disease and some cancers.

Studies have found that oxidative stress contributes to type 2 diabetes. This occurs when there is an imbalance between antioxidants and unstable molecules called free radicals in the body.

Blueberries, blackberries, strawberries, and raspberries all contain antioxidants and fiber. They also contain important other vitamins and minerals, including:

vitamin C, vitamin K, manganese, potassium

vitamin C

vitamin K

manganese

potassium

Sweet potatoes

Sweet potatoes rank lower on the GI scale than white potatoes. This makes them a great alternative for people with diabetes, as they release sugar more slowly and do not raise blood sugar as much. They are also a good source of fiber, which also helps with blood sugar regulation.

Sweet potatoes are also a great source of:

vitamin A

vitamin C

potassium

Probiotic yogurt

Probiotics are the helpful bacteria that live in the human gut and improve digestion and overall health.

A small 2022 study found that people with type 2 diabetes and obesity who took probiotics supplements for 90 days had better blood sugar levels, higher levels of “good” cholesterol (also called HDL cholesterol), and healthier gut bacteria.

Another 2020 meta-analysis of 15 clinical trials found that probiotics may reduce insulin resistance, fasting blood sugar, and HbA1c (a measure of blood sugar management over a 3–4-month period) in people with diabetes.

A person should consider choosing a plain variety with no added sugar. Probiotic yogurt contains live, active cultures such as *Lactobacillus* and *Bifidobacterium*, which it may advertise on the label.

Chia seeds

People often call chia seeds a superfood because of their high antioxidant and omega-3 content. They are also a good source of plant-based protein and fiber.

In one small-scale trial from 2017, people who had overweight and type 2 diabetes lost more weight after 6 months when they included chia seeds in their diets compared with those who ate an oat bran alternative. The researchers support the beneficial role of chia seeds helping people with type 2 diabetes to manage their weight more effectively.

Obesity is a significant risk factor for diabetes, and weight loss can help with improved blood sugar management.

What is a good diet for people with diabetes?

According to the ADA, a beneficial foods for people with diabetes includes the following:

fruits and vegetables

lean protein

foods with less added sugar

fewer processed foods

Although, as the ADA also reports, no single diet offers more benefits to a person with diabetes than another.

However, research suggests that a low carbohydrate diet may be useful. It may help reduce cravings, lower blood sugar, and boost energy. It may also help people with diabetes maintain a moderate weight.

Low carb diets also have variations, including:

keto diet Mediterranean diet paleo diet vegetarian or veg and diet

keto diet

Mediterranean diet

paleo diet

vegetarian or veg and diet

The following is a sample low carb menu for a person with diabetes.

Foods to limit

One way to manage diabetes with dietary changes is to balance high and low GI foods. High GI foods increase blood sugar more than low GI foods.

When choosing high GI foods, limit portions and pair them with sources of protein or healthy fats to reduce their effect on blood sugar and feel fuller for longer.

Foods high on the GI scale include:

white bread puffed rice white rice white pasta white potatoes chocolate cookies cakes potato chips regular soda

white bread

puffed rice

white rice

white pasta

white potatoes

chocolate

cookies

cakes

potato chips

regularsoda

People with diabetes may also wish to limit or balance portions of the following foods:

Carb-heavy foods

Carbohydrates(carbs) are an important part of all meals. However, people with diabetes may benefit from limiting their carb intake or pairing carbs with a healthy protein or fat source.

Saturated and trans fats

Certain fats, such as saturated and trans fats, may increase insulin resistance and contribute to reduced blood sugar management in people with diabetes. Many fried and processed foods, including fries, chips, and baked goods, contain these types of fats.

Refined sugar

People with diabetes should limit or avoid sources of refined sugar, such as store-bought or homemade sweets, cakes, and biscuits.

The American Heart Association recommends consuming no more than 25 g or 6 teaspoons (tsp) of added sugar per day for females, and 36 g or 9 tsp for males. This does not include naturally occurring sugars from foods such as fruit or plain milk.

Learn about diabetes and sugar intake.

Sugary drinks

Drinks that contain a lot of sugar, such as energy drinks, some coffees, and shakes, can disrupt a person's insulin level, leading to an imbalance.

Salty foods

Foods that are high in salt can raise blood pressure. Salt may appear as "sodium" on a food label.

The ADA recommends limiting the sodium intake to under 2,300 milligrams (mg) per day, regardless of a person's diabetes status.

Alcohol

Drinking alcohol in moderation should not carry serious risks for people with diabetes and should not affect long-term glucose management.

However, people with diabetes should avoid mixed drinks or cocktails as these often contain added sugars that can lead to blood sugar spikes.

People prescribed insulin or insulin secretagogue therapies may have a higher risk of hypoglycemia linked to alcohol consumption.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that females who drink alcohol limit it to one drink per day and that males limit it to two drinks per day, regardless of diabetes status.

Learn about how alcohol affects diabetes.

What about gestational diabetes?

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) recommends that people with gestational diabetes work with their healthcare team to create a balanced meal plan that meets the needs of them and the fetus while keeping blood sugars in check.

Learn more about the best diet for gestational diabetes.

Frequently asked questions

Below are some frequently asked questions about diet and diabetes.

What is a good diet for people with diabetes?

No single diet offers more benefits to a person with diabetes than another.

However, a low-carbohydrate diet may be beneficial. It may help reduce cravings, lower blood sugar, and boost energy. It may also help people with diabetes maintain a moderate weight. A person can also consult a dietitian about which foods they can add to their dietary plans.

What foods should someone with diabetes avoid?

People with diabetes may wish to avoid or limit processed foods, fried foods, foods high in saturated or trans fat, very salty foods, and foods or drinks with added sugar.

What are the three rules of a diabetic diet?

Three areas may help someone with diabetes keep their blood glucose levels in the desired range. These areas include what, when, and how much they should eat.

People should aim to have a balanced diet with foods from all of the different food groups.

When a person should eat can vary from person to person. Creating a meal schedule may help some people with diabetes maintain their blood glucose levels.

Eating the right amount of food can help someone with diabetes maintain their blood glucose levels.

How can someone lower their A1c levels?

Dietary changes that may help someone with diabetes lower their A1c levels include eating regularly, being mindful of portion sizes, eating a variety of foods, and spreading carbohydrate-rich foods throughout the day.

Summary

People with diabetes can work with a healthcare professional to develop a personalized nutrition plan.

Following a nutritious, balanced diet that contains the foods listed above can help people with diabetes manage their condition and prevent complications by:

managing blood sugar
lowering inflammation
reducing the risk of heart disease
increasing antioxidant activity
reducing the risk of kidney disease

managing blood sugar

lowering inflammation

reducing the risk of heart disease

increasing antioxidant activity

reducing the risk of kidney disease

Pregnant people with gestational diabetes can work with a healthcare professional to create a meal plan that helps them and the fetus stay safe and healthy.

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※ 표 정보

연번: 1

Breakfast: Lunch

Egg and avocado toast(serves 4):• 4eggs• 4 slices of whole grain bread• 1 mashedavocado• add salt,black pepper, and plain nonfatGreek yogurtto the avocado: Mediterranean tuna salad wrap(serves 6):• 1 packet of tuna in water (12-ounce)• light mayonnaise (1/4 cup)• plain nonfat yogurt (3 tbsp)• finely dicedonion(1/4 cup)• 1 finely dicedcelery• finely diced redbell pepper(1/2 pepper)• chopped kalamataolives(3 tbsp)• black pepper (1/4 tsp)• 6 large butter lettuce leaves

연번: 2

Breakfast: Dinner

Egg and avocado toast(serves 4):• 4eggs• 4 slices of whole grain bread• 1 mashedavocado• add salt,black pepper, and plain nonfatGreek yogurtto the avocado: Pecan-crusted chicken breast(serves 4):• pecan pieces (1/2 cup)• 4 boneless, skinlesschickenbreasts (6 oz)• unsweetened applesauce (3 tbsp)• spicy brown mustard (1 tbsp)•sea salt(1/4 tsp)

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