

Tips for healthy eating if you are at risk of type 2 diabetes

Lots of factors can contribute to someone being at risk of or diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. With the right support there are some things that you can change, but others you can't. Our tips on healthy eating could help reduce your risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

Things like your age, ethnicity and family history can all contribute to your overall risk. We also know that living with overweight or obesity is the most significant risk factor. If you know you are living with overweight or obesity getting support to lose weight when you are ready is one way you could prevent or delay type 2 diabetes.

Any amount of weight loss can help, research shows losing even 1kg can help to reduce your risk. There are so many different ways to lose weight, so it's important to find out what works best for you and know what support is available to help you.

We know that not everyone who is at risk or living with diabetes type 2 diabetes is living with overweight or obesity. But whether or not weight loss is part of your plan, it is still important to think about the foods you eat. Research tells us that there are even certain foods that are linked to reducing the risk of type 2 diabetes.

Here are some top tips on healthier foods and drinks:

Choose drinks without added sugar

We know there is a link between having full sugar fizzy and energy drinks, and an increased risk of type 2 diabetes. Cutting down on these can help to reduce your risk and support keeping your weight down. If you are finding it hard to cut down, look out for diet or low calorie versions of soft drinks and check there's no added sugar. Try not to replace sugary drinks with fruit juices or smoothies as these still contain a high amount of free sugar. Try plain water, plain milk, tea or coffee without added sugar, as replacements. Evidence also shows that drinking unsweetened tea and coffee is associated with a reduced risk.

Choose higher fibre carbs

Eating white bread, white rice, sugary breakfast cereals or other simple starchy foods, known as refined carbs, are linked with an increased risk of type 2 diabetes. But wholegrains such as brown rice, wholewheat pasta, wholemeal flour, wholegrain bread and oats are linked to a reduced risk so choose these instead. When you're out shopping remember to check food labels to see if a food is high fibre. Compare different foods to find the ones with the most fibre in them.

Other healthy sources of carbs include:

fruit and vegetables

pulses such as chickpeas, beans and lentils

dairy like unsweetened yoghurt and milk.

Having more fibre is also associated with lower risk of other serious conditions such as obesity, heart diseases and certain types of cancers. It's also important to think about your carbohydrate portion sizes.

"Becoming educated on food labelling, which appears on all food packets was massive benefit as we were able to identify highly processed foods and those with high levels of sugar, fat and salt which has helped us make much healthier food choices."

Cut down on red and processed meat

Having more red and processed meats like bacon, ham, sausages, pork, beef and lamb are all associated with an increased risk of type 2 diabetes. They also have links to heart problems and certain types of cancer.

Try to get your protein from healthier foods like:

pulses such as beans and lentils

eggs
fish
chicken and turkey
unsalted nuts.

Fish is really good for us and oily fish like salmon and mackerel are rich in omega-3 oil which helps protect your heart. Try to have at least one portion of oily fish each week and one portion of white fish.

Eat plenty of fruit and veg

Including more fruit and vegetables in your diet is linked with a reduced risk of type 2 diabetes. But did you know there are also certain types of fruit and veg that have been specifically associated with a reduced risk?

These are:

apples
grapes
berries
green leafy veg such as spinach, kale, watercress, rocket.

It doesn't matter whether they are fresh or frozen, try to find ways to include these in your diet. Try having them as snacks or an extra portion of veg with your meals.

It can be confusing to know whether you should eat certain types of fruit, because they contain sugar. The good news is the natural sugar in whole fruit is not the type of added (or free) sugar we need to cut down on. But drinks like fruit juices and smoothies do contain free sugar, so eat the whole fruit and veg instead.

Choose unsweetened yogurt and cheese

Yogurt and cheese are fermented dairy products and they have been linked with a reduced risk of type 2 diabetes. You might be wondering whether to choose full fat or low fat? When it comes to dairy and risk of type 2 diabetes, the amount of fat from these dairy foods is not as important. What is more important is that you choose unsweetened options like plain natural or Greek yoghurt and plain milk. Having three portions of dairy each day also helps you to get the calcium your body needs. A portion of dairy is:

200ml (1/3 pint) milk
30g cheese
125g yoghurt.

Be sensible with alcohol

Drinking too much alcohol is linked with an increased risk of type 2 diabetes. As it is also high in calories, drinking lots can make it difficult if you are trying to lose weight. Current guidelines recommend not regularly drinking more than 14 units per week and that these units should be spread evenly over 3-4 days. Try to have a few days per week without any alcohol at all. Drinking heavily on one or two days per week, known as binge drinking, will also increase the risk of other health conditions such as certain types of cancer.

Choose healthier snacks

If you want a snack, instead of crisps, chips, biscuits, sweets and chocolates, go for things like:
unsweetened yoghurts
unsalted nuts
seeds
fruits and vegetables.

But watch your portions as it'll help you keep an eye on your weight.

Include healthier fats in your diet

It's important to have some healthy fat in our diets because it gives us energy. The type of fat we

choose can affect our health. Some saturated fats can increase the amount of cholesterol in your blood, increasing your risk of heart problems. These are mainly found in animal products and prepared food like:

red and processed meat

butter

lard

ghee

biscuits, cakes, sweets, pies and pastries.

Coconut and palm oil can also affect our cholesterol levels. If you are at risk of type 2 diabetes, you are likely to be at an increased risk of heart problems so try to reduce these foods.

Healthier fats are found in foods like:

unsalted nuts

seeds

avocados

olive oil, rapeseed oil, sunflower oil.

We also know that the type of fat found in oily fish like salmon and mackerel is linked with a reduced risk, especially if you are from a South Asian background.

Cut down on salt

Eating lots of salt can increase your risk of high blood pressure, which can lead to an increased risk of heart disease and stroke. Having high blood pressure has also been linked to an increased risk of type 2 diabetes. Try to limit yourself to a maximum of one teaspoonful (6g) of salt a day. Lots of pre-packaged foods like bacon, sausages, crisps and ready meals already contain salt. So remember to check food labels and choose those with less salt in them. Cooking from scratch will help you keep an eye on how much salt you're eating. Instead of adding extra salt to your food try out different herbs and spices to add in extra flavour.

Getting vitamins and minerals from food instead of tablets

You might have heard that certain vitamins and supplements can reduce your risk of type 2 diabetes. Currently we don't have evidence to say this is true. So, unless you've been told to take something by your healthcare team, like folic acid for pregnancy, you don't need to take supplements.

It's better to get all your vitamins and minerals by eating a mixture of different foods.