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Eating On The Go:

Diabetes-Friendly Tips and Recipes

Shelby Kinnaird



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This e-book was medically reviewed by Kathy W. Warwick, RD, CDE.

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Contents

- Introduction** **3**
- Eating well when away from home** **4**
 - Reading nutrition labels **4**
 - Making a plan **5**
 - Convenience stores, gas stations, and airports **5**
 - Fast food **6**
 - Restaurants **8**
 - Parties and other events **12**
- Eating well with a busy schedule** **12**
 - Grocery shopping **12**
 - Quick meals **14**
 - Portable meals **15**
 - Lunches **15**
 - Snacks **16**
 - Meal delivery services: Why you might want to try one **16**
- Recipes** **20**
 - Breakfast** **20**
 - Spiced overnight oats with applesauce & chia **20**
 - Turkey bacon & egg muffins **22**
 - Lunch and dinner** **23**
 - Shrimp salad stuffed avocado **23**
 - Slow cooker teriyaki pork with peanut sauce **25**
 - Snacks** **27**
 - Cucumber bites with hummus and tomatoes **27**
 - Desserts** **28**
 - 2-Ingredient grilled peaches **28**
- You’ve got this** **29**
- References** **29**
- About the author** **29**

Introduction

Twenty years ago BD (before diabetes), I ate a Southern-style diet. I grew up with foods like fried chicken, potato salad, biscuits and gravy, cornbread, mashed potatoes, pulled pork, chicken and dumplings, pot pie, peach cobbler, chocolate pie, and sweet tea. Lunch and dinner weren't complete without both bread *and* dessert. When I got my type 2 diagnosis in 1999, I realized my diet needed to change.

Over the years, I've figured out how to make healthier, tasty meals at home, but it's been a challenge. We're all busy. Life is stressful. Getting a complete, balanced, diabetes-friendly meal on the table can be a big ask, especially after a jam-packed day.

While I feel pretty good about how I eat at home, there are still times that I eat out. It can be hard to stay on track when I'm doing things like:

- meeting a friend for coffee at a café where the pastries are tempting and the carbs are abundant
- attending a conference with meals chosen by someone who doesn't have diabetes
- celebrating a birthday or holiday
- taking a road trip where the only available options are convenience foods

The good news is that eating well and keeping your blood glucose (BG) in check is possible even when you find yourself in situations when making unhealthy choices seems so much easier.

This e-book contains tips and strategies to help you eat healthy whether you're traveling, socializing, cooking after a stressful day, or packing lunch for work. I'll also share a few of my go-to recipes that are easy and quick to make and should fit into your diabetes food plan.

Even though you're busy, you can do this. Let's get started.



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Eating well when away from home

It can be hard to make healthy food choices constantly — especially when you're out enjoying yourself at a restaurant or party, and food is part of the fun. You don't have to be perfect all the time, but in order to live well with diabetes, it's important to be aware of how the foods you eat affect your blood sugar levels.

The more you know about what you're putting into your body, the better equipped you'll be to do that.

Reading nutrition labels and planning ahead are two great tools to keep in your healthy living tool kit. Pull them out when you need help navigating options to make good choices, no matter where you are.

Reading nutrition labels

There are lots of ways to eat well with diabetes. Some people may have success with a very low-carb diet, while others might do well with a moderate-carb, low-fat diet. But no matter how you choose to eat, nutrition labels can be your best friends if you know how to read them and understand what's important for *your* body.

Nutrition labels are easy to spot on packaged foods, and many restaurants, especially larger chains, also provide nutrition information. In fact, restaurants with more than 20 locations are required by law to provide calorie counts. Sometimes you'll find this information directly on the menu, but other times you might have to ask or do some research online. Many [smartphone apps](#) also show nutrition information for popular restaurant menu items.

Once I have a nutrition label in front of me, here are the items I tend to zero in on. These are a great starting point, but keep in mind that other information may be important for you as well, depending on your unique situation. For example, if you have kidney disease, you may need to watch [potassium counts](#).

- **Serving size**

Paying attention to serving size is a great way to manage your diet while still allowing room for the things you love. It's OK to have a treat every now and then, as long as you keep your servings on the smaller size. Check the package to see what's recommended, and portion out a serving before putting the rest away.

- **Calories**

Everybody has different caloric needs, depending on factors like gender, height, activity level, and more. If you don't know how many calories you should eat each day, talk to your doctor. For a quick estimate, use [this calculator](#).

- **Total carbs**

Blood sugar levels rise when you eat [carbs](#). That doesn't mean carbs are bad, but it does mean that if you have diabetes, you'll need to watch your carb intake a little more closely than someone without diabetes would. When you're looking at a nutrition label, be sure to note the number of carbs, and see if the food fits in with your meal plan. If not, can you reduce your portion size to cut back on the carbs and still get a decent-sized serving?

- **Fiber**

[Fiber](#) is a type of indigestible carb that doesn't affect your blood sugar levels. It helps keep your gut and heart healthy. Subtract the grams of fiber from the grams of total carbs in a food, and you'll get the [net carbs](#). The Institute of Medicine (IOM)'s [Dietary Reference Intakes \(DRI\)](#) recommends at least 25 grams (g) of fiber each day for women and 38 g for men under the age of 50. Fiber recommendations decrease to 21 g for women and 30 g for men after the age of 51.

- **Sodium**

This is especially important to note when reviewing a nutrition label, as people living with diabetes have a higher risk of cardiovascular disease and [high blood pressure](#) than people without diabetes. The American Diabetes Association (ADA) recommends that most people with diabetes [limit sodium to 2,300 milligrams \(mg\) daily](#).

Making a plan

When you think about planning as it relates to food, you might think about meticulously plotting exactly what you're going to eat for each meal and snack. And for some people, that may work. But it doesn't have to be that complicated.

A plan can simply be thinking about a few nutritious foods to look for before heading into a convenience store. Or checking the nutritional information at McDonalds before stopping there on a road trip.

With a little planning, you can make great choices almost anywhere and find foods that won't spike your blood sugar. You just have to know what to look for.

Convenience stores, gas stations, and airports

- **Look for nuts and seeds.** [Nuts](#) are high in healthy fats and protein, which will help keep you full. Seeds like sunflower and pumpkin can make great snacks, too. If you want a mix of nuts and seeds, try to find one that doesn't include candy such as M&M's. Pick unsalted nuts and seeds, if possible, and be sure to watch portion size — one serving is about one small handful.
- **See if you can find any fresh foods.** Many convenience stores offer fresh options like fruit, cheese, hard-boiled eggs, and salads. I especially like it when I can find a combination tray of cheese, grapes, and almonds. Salads are a healthy choice, but might not be very filling if they don't include some sort of protein. If that's the case, try adding some cheese or chopped egg on top.

What to look for at convenience stores

nuts and seeds

fresh foods

unsweetened
beverages

cheese, yogurt,
and cottage cheese

jerky

soup

- **Stick to water, unsweetened tea, and black coffee.**

Coconut water has a few carbs, but can be a nice change of pace if it's available. Some studies — one from [2011](#) and another from [2016](#) — even indicate that compounds found in coconut water might help moderate blood sugar levels in people with diabetes. Be sure to check the ingredients list so you can choose one without added sugars. If you want something with a little more flavor, try flavored water or sparkling water.

- **Load up on dairy.** Most convenience stores have cheese in some form — like string cheese, sliced cheddar, or prosciutto-wrapped mozzarella. Look for it with the fresh foods and in the refrigerated dairy section. Yogurt and

cottage cheese are often available as well. Plain Greek yogurt is your best choice if you can find it. Read labels to check calories and carb counts before buying flavored yogurt. Cottage cheese or yogurt mixed with nuts, seeds, and fruit (if available) makes a great, protein-rich snack or breakfast. Don't forget to grab a spoon!

- **Look for jerky.** Beef jerky is low-carb, high-protein, and easy to find in convenience stores. Jerky made from lower-fat proteins like turkey, bison, and fish can be great choices, too. Select the jerky that's lowest in sodium.
- **Try soup.** Look for those that are broth-based (instead of cream-based), and check sodium and carb counts before picking one.

What about when you really want a treat? If you want something salty and crunchy, try looking for a snack like Moon Cheese, roasted chickpeas or chickpea puffs, or kale chips. These are getting easier to find and are usually lower in carbs and fat than chips.

If you're craving something sweet and fruit won't cut it, look for a dark chocolate bar and enjoy it with some almonds. Check the carb count — you may only want to eat half of the bar.

Fast food

Fast food has a reputation for being unhealthy — it's usually high in carbs and calories, which can be especially challenging for people with diabetes. But there are still ways to eat well when fast food is your only option.

If you can, check the nutrition information for several major fast food restaurants before you leave for a trip, and make a list of options that fit your meal plan. When it's time to order, consult your list to avoid being tempted by higher-carb foods. If you have a smartphone, store your list there for easy reference. Here are some healthier options to consider.

Breakfast

- **Look for scrambled eggs and fruit.** If you opt for a breakfast sandwich, choose one on an English muffin instead of a biscuit, bagel, or croissant. English muffins tend to be lower in fat and carbs than other options. If you're looking to save calories, you can go with lower-fat Canadian bacon instead of sausage, and if you're looking to limit cholesterol intake, consider [egg whites](#) instead of whole eggs. Add some avocado or tomato if they offer it — you'll get extra nutrients without a lot of added carbs.
- **Some chains also serve hot oatmeal or other whole grains.** Though grains are high in carbs, they can be a healthy choice if you watch the serving size. Be sure to keep an eye on the sugar — ask if it's mixed in, or if you can leave it out. You can always add some nuts or berries to spice things up a little.

Example

At McDonald's, try an Egg McMuffin and apple slices. You'll ring up only 315 calories, 12 g fat, and 34 g carb. If your location offers the Egg White Delight McMuffin, you can reduce the calories and fat even more.

Lunch and dinner

- **Pick a salad with a healthy protein source like grilled chicken or hard-boiled eggs.** Pick a vinaigrette rather than a creamy dressing for a lower-calorie option.
- **Some chains offer burgers wrapped in lettuce instead of on buns, or sandwich ingredients on a bed of lettuce instead of bread.** These can be a great option if you're in the mood for a sandwich but don't want the blood sugar spike.
- **Look for a sandwich or sub served on whole-grain bread or buns.** [Sourdough](#) is also a good choice. Pick leaner proteins like turkey breast and chicken and load up on vegetables like leafy greens, tomatoes, and peppers. Choose mustard or an oil and vinegar-based dressing instead of mayonnaise. Order a smaller size — like a six-inch instead of a foot-long at Subway — or save half for later. You can also make an open-faced sandwich by removing one slice of bread to reduce carbs.
- **Some chains offer non-starchy sides like green beans, steamed broccoli, and spinach instead of fries or tater tots.** You can also opt for a side salad or fruit cup. If you want a potato, the healthiest choice is a baked potato, topped with salsa or chili — like at Wendy's — instead of butter and sour cream. Share it with someone else if it's large.
- **Buy a kids meal for yourself!** Or, order a smaller size of something you might usually go for. For example, at Burger King, try ordering a Whopper Junior instead of a regular Whopper. Some fast food chains offer fruit, yogurt, or other options in place of fries in the kids meal.
- **See if broth-based soups and stews are available.** Look for chili (with beans), or vegetable, chicken, or tomato soup. Brunswick stew, a tomato-based stew made with beans, vegetables, and meat, can be a great option at BBQ restaurants.

Example

At KFC, try a Georgia Gold Grilled Chicken Breast plus green beans and a house side salad with Marzetti Light Italian Dressing. The whole meal has 300 calories, 11 g fat, and 10 g carb.

Restaurants

Eating at a restaurant can be tough when you're trying to manage diabetes. There are lots of options, portions are often large, and you don't have control over how your food is prepared. But don't worry! There are a few different strategies you can use to try to keep portions healthy.

Tips for restaurant dining

Stick to the basics.

Share with a friend.

Order an appetizer as your main.

Ask how your food is prepared.

- **If there are too many options and you're not sure which is best, stick to the basics.** You can't go wrong with steamed or sautéed veggies, fresh salads, and simple proteins.
- **If the portions are bigger than you want or need, ask your server to box up half the meal ahead of time.** Or, share an entrée with your dining companion. That's often what my husband and I do. If we're really hungry, we'll share both an appetizer and an entrée.

- **If you're eating solo, order off the appetizer menu instead of the main course menu.** I like to look for seafood items that aren't deep-fried, like seared tuna, peel-and-eat shrimp, steamed mussels, or oysters on the half shell. I'll usually pair the appetizer with a side salad, steamed vegetables, or a cup of soup.
- **If you're not sure how a food is prepared, ask!** Your server might be able to accommodate a different preparation method, or you might be able to make a substitution. For example, if you're ordering a burger and the carbs in the bun put you at your limit, see if you can substitute a salad for that side of fries.

Here are a few other strategies for healthy restaurant dining.

American

- **Skip the bread basket.** Just because a restaurant offers you free bread doesn't mean you have to take it. Politely decline and save yourself some carbs. If others are dining with you and they want the bread, ask them to place it at the far end of the table out of your reach.
- **Look for entrées where the protein and sides are separate.** Choosing a healthy protein like grilled salmon plus non-starchy sides like broccoli, asparagus, or carrots will have less impact on your blood sugar than eating a sandwich or casserole. Dishes where everything is mixed together often have hidden carbs and fat.
- **Try a salad with leafy greens and lots of non-starchy vegetables topped with lean protein.** Ask for a vinaigrette-style dressing or simply oil and vinegar. Flavored balsamic vinegar also makes a great salad dressing on its own. If you want another type of dressing, ask for it on the side. Dip your fork into the dressing before loading up your salad greens. Each bite will have a taste of dressing, and you'll use less than if you had it mixed into the salad.

- **Pick soup and a side salad.** A smaller salad paired with a cup of chili or soup loaded with vegetables makes for a healthy meal. Beans or lentils in either the soup or salad will give you a boost of fiber, but cream-based soups will add calories and fat. Note that restaurant soups tend to be higher in sodium than soups you might make at home or buy at the store.

Mexican

- **Skip the chips.** You'll save yourself some carbs here, too.
- **Order fajitas** without tortillas and rice or ask for burrito ingredients to be put in a bowl instead of wrapped up in a tortilla. Add some guacamole on top for a shot of healthy fat.
- **Get tortilla soup** with chicken and avocado.
- **Look for grilled chicken or shrimp dishes** featuring peppers, onions, and tomatoes. Skip the rice and tortillas, and ask for a serving of black or pinto beans or a salad on the side.
- **Pick tomato-based salsas or guacamole instead of queso.**

Italian

- **Try Caprese salad** (tomato, mozzarella, and fresh basil with balsamic vinaigrette) or **Caesar salad** topped with chicken.
- **Fill up on minestrone and lentil soup.**
- **Order grilled fish or chicken** with non-starchy sides, such as green beans.
- **If you do want pasta, make it your side instead of your main entree.** Stick to 1/3 cup (about a handful), and go with a marinara or pesto rather than a cream sauce like alfredo, which tends to be higher in fat and calories.

- **If pizza is your only option, choose thin-crust loaded with healthy veggies** like mushrooms and peppers instead of high-fat meats. Pair it with a side salad, and eat that first. This strategy may help you eat less pizza later, which will save on carbs.

Chinese

- **Start with egg drop or hot and sour soup.**
- **Try steamed fish or chicken with vegetables** like broccoli and carrots. Avoid overly sweet sauces.
- **Ask for brown rice.** [Brown rice](#) has a lower glycemic index score than white rice does, so it won't raise your blood sugar as fast. Limit your portion to 1/2 cup, or less than the size of a cupcake.

Japanese

- **Try miso soup, cucumber salad, seaweed salad, and steamed edamame** as appetizers.
- **Choose sashimi** instead of nigiri or sushi rolls. Sashimi won't include rice, so it won't spike blood sugar.

Indian

- **Look for dishes like saag paneer**, which combines paneer with nutrient-rich spinach. Paneer is a type of cheese that's high in protein and low in carbs.
- **Look for dal or daal (lentils) or chana (chickpeas).** These dishes will contain plant-based protein and lots of fiber.
- **Try bhindi masala**, an okra dish. Okra is high in fiber and may have [benefits for diabetes](#).

- **Choose either bread or rice (instead of both)**, and pay attention to portion sizes.
- **If you choose to eat bread, know that roti and paratha are made with whole-wheat flour** and naan is made with refined white flour. Breads containing whole-wheat flour are higher in fiber and other nutrients than are breads made with white flour.

Vietnamese

- **Avoid dishes like pho** and other soups where noodles are the star.
- **Look for salads** like goi ngo sen (lotus root salad) or goi tom (shrimp salad).
- **Avoid congee**, rice porridge with savory ingredients like mushrooms and beans. It's high in carbs and wouldn't be your best choice.
- **Look for kho to** (clay pot) dishes made with meat or fish.

Thai

- **Avoid noodle dishes** like pad Thai and drunken noodles, since these are generally high in carbs.
- **Try satay** (skewered grilled meat – an Indonesian dish that's also popular at Thai restaurants) and a bowl of **tom kha gai** (spicy chicken, ginger, garlic, lemongrass soup made with coconut milk).
- **Look for whole fish options.** Ask for vegetables instead of rice as your side.
- **Skip rice**, or watch your portion size.
- **Be wary of sauces.** They can be high in fat and sugar.

Cafés and coffee shops

Cafés and coffee shops may be the trickiest places to eat when you have diabetes. Most food options are baked goods, like scones, croissants, pastries, bagels, doughnuts, and cookies, and many beverage choices are loaded with sugar and calories.

If you're going to a larger chain like Starbucks or Peet's Coffee, check nutrition information ahead of time so you'll know what to order (and what not to). Here are some general guidelines that may help you navigate the options:

Treat yourself!

Make your fancy drink a little easier on your blood sugar by:

ordering the smallest size (like a “short” at Starbucks, which is just 8 ounces)

asking for sugar-free syrups

considering soy or almond milk

skipping the whipped cream

asking the barista to use half the amount of sweetener they normally would

asking for sugar-free flavored syrups

- **Make unsweetened tea or regular coffee your beverage of choice.** Hot green tea, preferably loose-leaf, is my go-to. With coffee, you can add a little bit of cow's milk, soy milk, coconut milk, or almond milk — [soy and almond will have fewer carbs than cow's milk](#).

However, keep in mind that plant-based milks typically have less protein than cow's milk. For a boost of flavor without the added sugar, try adding a sprinkle of cinnamon or nutmeg. In general, fancy espresso-based drinks tend to have lots of sugar — some can contain upwards of 30 g, and even the “light” versions can contain more than 20 g of carbs. That doesn't mean you absolutely *can't* have one, but save drinks like these for an occasional treat and choose wisely.

- **Look for egg options that aren't sandwiches.** Starbucks, for example, offers sous vide egg bites with ingredients like red pepper, ham, and cheese for less than 13 g carb per serving. Peet's Coffee serves crustless quiche muffins stuffed with tomato and kale.
- **Check for fresh fruit, or even fruit cups.** Just make sure they don't have any added sugar. Berries and apples are your best choices because they won't spike your blood sugar as much as other fruits, like bananas.
- **Keep an eye out for protein trays.** Sometimes prepackaged trays featuring cheese or hard-boiled eggs and fruit are available — like at Starbucks. These are also a good choice on a flight or in a train's café car.
- **Oatmeal, especially steel-cut oatmeal, can be a healthy choice.** [Ask for it unsweetened](#), and add some nuts and berries. You may need to watch your portion size.
- **Avoid fruit smoothies.** Check nutrition information before you order. In general, it's best to make your own [diabetes-friendly smoothies](#) at home so you're in control of the ingredients. Since fruit smoothies are high in sugar, and therefore carbs, enjoy them in moderation. Try making one ahead of time and storing it in a thermos or freezing it in a large mason jar. Pack it in your bag in the morning, and it'll be thawed and ready to drink by afternoon.
- **Parfaits featuring yogurt, berries, and nuts may be healthy choices if plain yogurt is used and no honey or other sweetener is added.** If flavored yogurt is in the parfait, even vanilla, it'll likely contain added sugar. Read the label or ask questions before you purchase a parfait.

Parties and other events

What about situations where you don't have any control over the food being served? You may be attending a wedding or holiday party. You may be at a business conference or work event. Healthy choices might be available, but you can't count on it. Here are some things you can do to eat healthy during these events:

- **Eat something before you go.** This is one effective strategy to keep your BG in range during a party. Don't have a huge meal, but do eat a hearty high-protein snack. If you're starving when you arrive, you'll be tempted to eat things that aren't part of your meal plan.
- **Graze, but don't have huge portions of high-carb foods.** Enjoy a bite or two of whatever foods you want to try, but leave it at that — a taste.
- **Load up on low-carb foods** like shrimp, deviled eggs, and chicken skewers and non-starchy vegetables like broccoli, cauliflower, cherry tomatoes, and bell pepper strips.
- **Offer to bring a dish to the party** and make it low-carb and tasty. Vegetable-based dishes or a fruit-based dessert that fits with your meal plan are good options.
- **Keep tabs on your BG when you drink**, especially if you take insulin, as it can cause [hypoglycemia](#) (low blood sugar). Alcohol may be OK for some people, but not everyone. Ask your healthcare team what's right for you.
- **See if you can request a low-carb meal ahead of time**, if you're attending a conference or banquet where food is provided. Understand that not everyone knows how to make low-carb food taste good, however! In general, you'll be fine if you pick the chicken or fish meal option and skip the bread and dessert.

Eating well with a busy schedule

Making healthy choices when you're eating out is one thing, but even eating at home can be tough sometimes. The more crowded your schedule gets and the longer your to-do list grows, the harder it can be. It's easy to grab fast food for lunch, choose an afternoon snack out of the vending machine, or order takeout instead of cooking dinner at home. But with a little planning, you can eat well *and* save time.

Grocery shopping

Quick kitchen staples

rotisserie chicken

microwaveable
whole grains

frozen fruits
and veggies

canned beans

cauliflower
pizza crusts

spiralized veggies

frozen shrimp

salad

It might seem like cooking at home is time-consuming — and it can be. But quick, homemade meals often start with smart shopping.

If you load up on ingredients that are easy to prepare, or are partially prepared already, you'll be well on your way to a quick meal.

Here's what to look for at the grocery store:

- **Rotisserie chicken** is low-carb and can be used in any recipe that calls for cooked chicken. Remove the skin if you want to cut back on fat. You can also simply slice the chicken and serve it with healthy sides or on top of a salad for a quick meal.

- **Whole grains**, which usually take a while to cook, can be purchased in microwaveable pouches. Imagine having a quinoa and brown rice blend ready to serve in 90 seconds! Do keep an eye on portion size and sodium counts, however. Some packages may look like a single serving, but actually contain two or more. And sodium is sometimes added for flavor and shelf stability.
- **Frozen fruits and vegetables** can be a good alternative to fresh, and are generally already cut up, making them easy to add to a recipe. Packaged soon after harvesting, many frozen fruits and vegetables offer more nutritional benefits than their canned cousins, which can lose some of their nutritional value during the canning process. Buy varieties that don't have any added sauce, sugar, or other ingredients. For example, if you're buying strawberries, the only item in the ingredient list should be strawberries. If you're buying vegetables, skip the options that feature cheese or butter sauce. Check out frozen cauliflower rice as an alternative to white rice. There are many vegetable options that are packaged in microwaveable bags.
- **Some products sold in cans, bottles, or jars**, like tomato sauce and salsa, are convenient and can be perfectly healthy, but you do need to carefully read the labels. Pick brands that don't have any ingredients that sound more like chemicals than food, and watch sodium counts. Also be aware that some pasta sauces and low-fat salad dressings contain added sugar. (Sometimes you're better off with a full-fat or light salad dressing, carb-wise.) Keep canned beans, a great plant-based protein, in the pantry. Give them a quick rinse to remove sodium, and add them to your favorite dishes for a boost of protein and fiber.
- **Spiralized vegetables** make great pasta substitutes. Many grocery stores offer zucchini, butternut squash, and sweet potato noodles in the produce section. All they need is a quick sauté in a little olive oil. You won't spend any time spiralizing your own vegetables, waiting for water to boil, or draining pasta. Note that zucchini is lower in carbs than butternut squash and sweet potatoes.

- **Cauliflower pizza crusts** are a quick and easy alternative to high-carb, wheat-based crusts and can be prepared with the same delicious toppings. For best results, follow the package directions for getting a crispy crust. This is a great way to get your family to try new foods in a form they understand. Some brands of cauliflower crusts are thin enough to be used as wraps, too. You can also bake the crust, then cut it into bite-sized pieces to make low-carb chips for serving with salsa, hummus, and guacamole.
- **Shrimp** is a great thing to keep in your freezer. You can thaw it under cold running water in about 5 minutes and use it in a stir-fry, or simply boil it with a little apple cider vinegar and seafood seasoning for a quick meal. Most commercially caught shrimp is frozen immediately, so frozen shrimp is actually fresher than the shrimp you'll find at the seafood counter, which has been frozen and thawed already.
- **Don't pass by your grocery store's salad bar** without giving it a look. You can mix together a side salad without having to do any chopping, or you can create other great vegetable-based side dishes using what's there. Combine cucumbers and cherry tomatoes with a vinaigrette, for example.

Quick meals

Now that you've conquered the shopping, it's time to think about cooking. Here are a few ways to get food on the table in a hurry:

- **Plan your meals for the week ahead of time.** You can be extremely detailed or not, whatever works best for you. I like to keep a list of recipes I want to try that week on the refrigerator and then make sure I have all of the ingredients. When it's dinner time, I can look at the list and decide what I'm in the mood for that night. (Or, if my husband gets hungry first, he can pick something and start cooking!)

- **Do meal prep on one of your days off.** I like Sunday. Make a soup or stew that'll serve as lunch or dinner later in the week or that you can freeze. Mix up a batch of homemade salad dressing that will last all week. (Try [homemade citrus vinaigrette](#).) Chop all vegetables and fruit you'll need during the week, especially onions. Prep a casserole like [white chicken lasagna with spaghetti squash](#) that you can slide into the oven the first day of the work week. Cook a big batch of oatmeal, mix up [spiced overnight oats with applesauce and chia](#), or make a batch of egg muffins (see [turkey bacon and egg muffins](#)) for quick breakfasts.
- **Cook once, eat at least twice.** Don't let any of your cooking time go to waste. Whenever you spend time in the kitchen, make more than you'll need for one meal. Plan to eat repurposed leftovers during the week or freeze the extra servings. For example, make [smoky whole chicken](#) for Sunday dinner, then use leftover chicken in [chicken enchilada-stuffed acorn squash](#), chicken salad, or chicken lettuce wraps later in the week.
- **Make a quick salad.** One of my go-to dinners is a bag of salad greens and boneless chicken breasts, both of which I have around most of the time. My husband grills the chicken while I put together the salad using some of the veggies I chopped and the dressing I made on prep day.
- **Have breakfast for dinner.** Omelets, for example, cook quickly, especially since you chopped all of the ingredients on prep day.
- **Store leftover meals in the freezer.** You can pull these out in a pinch. Soups like [turkey barley vegetable soup](#) and chilis like [vegetarian chipotle chili](#) are perfect. Just defrost, reheat, and serve.
- **Consider investing in a slow cooker or electric pressure cooker (e.g., Instant Pot).** These can be huge time-savers. Slow cookers allow you to throw everything in a pot in the morning and then have a meal ready when you walk in the door in the evening. They cook

food slowly at a fairly low temperature over a long period of time. Electric pressure cookers cook food quickly at high temperatures. You can pull something out of the freezer and put in it an electric pressure cooker when you get home from work and have dinner on the table in an hour or so. If you aren't much of a planner, an electric pressure cooker may be the perfect appliance for you.

Portable meals

One of the best ways to make sure you aren't stuck with limited options during the workday is to bring food with you. It's easier to avoid the drive-through during lunch or the vending machine in the afternoon if you packed your own food.

It can be hard to figure out what to bring, though, especially if you're used to buying lunch. Here are some ideas for portable meals that are easy to prepare and pack.

Lunches

- **Leftovers** can be a great choice. Store single servings from the night before in microwaveable containers so you can just grab and go.
- **Salads** make healthy lunches — but they don't have to be boring. If they include greens, pack the dressing separately, so the greens don't wilt. Or, pack a lettuce-free salad — there's nothing better than [tomato peach salad with fresh mozzarella](#) in the summer! Mozzarella is also good with cherry tomatoes and chickpeas.
- **Homemade frozen food** tastes great and is often healthier than frozen meals you might find at the store. Freeze leftovers from dinner in individual containers, leave one to thaw in the fridge overnight, and then take it with you for a quick reheat in the microwave at lunchtime.

- **Egg-based dishes** like crustless quiche (see [crustless crab and asparagus quiche](#)) can work for either breakfast or lunch. For breakfast, serve with fresh fruit, or for lunch, serve with a salad.
- **Quick tuna salad** is a good option for days when you're low on groceries and don't have any leftovers. Just take a 3-ounce can of tuna, a packet of low-fat mayo, and a packet of pickle relish to work and mix it together at lunchtime. Serve it with nut-based crackers (like Nut Thins), carrot sticks, and a small apple.

Snacks

Quick snack ideas

nuts

hummus or guacamole
with veggies

trail mix

fruit

plain Greek yogurt

- My No. 1 snack, no question, is **a handful of nuts**. I usually pick pistachios, walnuts, or almonds. Nuts are high in calories, so if you're trying to lose weight, limit your portion sizes.
- Try **single-serving cups of guacamole and hummus**. Use carrot or celery sticks, cherry tomatoes, or cucumber or pepper slices as your dippers instead of chips or crackers. (Be sure to chop veggies on prep day.)
- Another great snack is “gorp,” or **trail mix**. (“Gorp” may or may not be an acronym for Good Old Raisins and Peanuts.) I make my own because I can customize it to what I like and skip the candy that's so often present in prepared trail mix. My favorite combination is walnuts, almonds, pistachios, pumpkin seeds, dark chocolate chips, and a little bit of dried fruit like golden raisins or unsweetened cranberries. My husband likes to add cashews, too. (If it's hot outside, I skip the dark chocolate because it melts and the gorp becomes one giant blob.) Use whatever combination of nuts, seeds, and dried fruit you like — just be sure the fruit doesn't have added sugar, and watch portion control so you don't get a blood sugar spike.

- **Fruit** is another great portable snack, especially paired with a piece of string cheese, a few nuts, or peanut or almond butter. Make sure to pick [fruits that fit with your meal plan](#).
- **Plain Greek yogurt** is loaded with protein. Top it with some combination of berries, nuts, and seeds for a sweet, creamy snack. Pack frozen berries in a sealed container when you leave for work. They should thaw by the time you're ready to eat them, and there will be a bit of juice you can use for sauce with no added sugar. This makes a great portable breakfast, too.
- **Hard-boiled eggs** are easy to pack. You can eat them as a snack or chop them up and add to a salad. Make enough to last the week on prep day.
- Try making [dark chocolate nut bark](#), if you believe every day needs a little chocolate. A perfect afternoon snack or sweet treat!

Meal delivery services

Even with an arsenal of grocery shopping tips and quick, easy meal ideas at your disposal, sometimes you just don't want to plan or shop. How great would it be if someone else, preferably a registered dietitian (RD) and professional chef, planned meals for you and then delivered the food to your doorstep? Fortunately, there are several companies that do just that.

To help you evaluate which meal delivery service might best fit your needs, consider the following questions:

- ☐ Which services offer diabetes-friendly or low-carb meal options?
How does the company define “diabetes-friendly” and “low-carb?”
Will the meals fit easily into your diabetes management plan?
- ☐ How much are you willing to pay for convenience?
- ☐ Would you prefer premade meals or a service that provides ingredients and recipes only?
- ☐ Do you want breakfasts, lunches, and dinners or some combination (e.g., lunches and dinners only)?
- ☐ Do you want meals for the work week only (5 days) or the entire week (7 days)?
- ☐ Do you have other dietary restrictions (gluten-free, vegetarian, etc.)?
- ☐ Will the meals just be for you or your entire family?
- ☐ Does the company deliver to your area?
- ☐ Is shipping included in the price? Can you pick up the meals somewhere locally to save on shipping?
- ☐ Is complete nutritional information provided for every meal?
- ☐ Who develops the recipes? An RD? A professional chef?
- ☐ How are the meals packaged? Will you be stuck with lots of extra coolers and ice packs to dispose of?
- ☐ Can you cancel the service or change your plan whenever you want?

Now that you better understand what type of service you want, here are a few companies that specifically offer “diabetes-friendly” or “low-carb” meal options.

- [**BistroMD**](#) was designed by a physician to help people lose weight. They offer a Diabetic-Friendly program with meals that contain 25 g of carb or less.
 - **Sample meals:** caramelized mushroom and onion frittata, shepherd’s pie, jerk spiced chicken with mango chutney and spinach
 - **Estimated cost:** \$
- [**Diet-to-Go**](#) offers a Balance-Diabetes program that’s lower in sodium, carbs, fat, and cholesterol than their other programs. They also offer a Keto-Carb30 program limited to 30 net carbs per day.
 - **Sample meals**, Balance-Diabetes plan: waffles with blueberry cream cheese, chicken pesto salad, Thai turkey tenderloin
 - **Sample meals**, Keto-Carb30 plan: spinach quiche, pork chop pomodoro, blackened salmon
 - **Estimated cost:** \$

- [**Magic Kitchen**](#) offers a Diabetic-Friendly program and a Low-Carb program. (They have many other options like Dialysis-Friendly and Low-Sodium, too.) The Diabetic-Friendly meals clock in at less than 65 g carb and less than 700 mg sodium. The Low-Carb meals contain less than 9 g carb per 100 g of food.
 - **Sample meals**, Diabetic-Friendly plan: cheese omelet and salsa with broccoli and hash browns, taco soup with cauliflower and sweet potatoes, meatballs with penne pasta and peas
 - **Sample meals**, Low-Carb plan: breakfast scramble with hash browns and asparagus, beef bourguignon, salmon caponata
 - **Estimated cost:** \$\$
- [**Sun Basket**](#) offers Carb-Conscious, Paleo, and Diabetes-Friendly programs in addition to several others. Meals in the Carb-Conscious plan feature less than 35 g net carbs and at least 25 g protein. Meals in the Paleo plan feature 20 to 25 g protein and at least 5 g fiber. Meals in the Diabetes-Friendly program feature at least 15 g protein, at least 5 g fiber, less than 100 g carb (less than 10 percent of calories from added sugar), less than 10 percent of calories from saturated fat, and less than 700 mg sodium.
 - **Sample meals**, Carb-Conscious plan: pork chops with braised leeks and radishes, salmon and braised fennel with charred orange and green goddess dressing
 - **Sample meals**, Paleo plan: Thai turkey lettuce cups, Green Goddess steak salad with roasted carrots
 - **Sample meals**, Diabetes-Friendly plan: braised chicken with mushrooms, artichokes, and almond-olive relish; seared pork with blueberry-apricot sauce and sautéed greens
 - **Estimated cost:** \$\$

- [Territory](#) offers Low-Carb, Paleo, Whole30, and Keto Reset programs in addition to several others. Meals in the Low-Carb plan feature less than 25 g total carbs. Meals in the Paleo plan include meats, vegetables, nuts, seeds, some fruit, and no refined sugar. Meals in the Whole30 plan exclude sugar, alcohol, grains, dairy, legumes, and processed food. Meals in the Keto Reset plan include 60 to 70 percent calories from fat, 20 to 25 percent from protein, and 5 to 10 percent from carbs.
 - **Sample meals**, Low-Carb plan: shredded beef ropas viejas with dirty cauliflower rice, garlic broccoli and scotch eggs with shredded brussels sprouts and bacon
 - **Sample meals**, Paleo plan: ghost pepper chicken with sun-dried tomato mashed potatoes, andouille sausage with spaghetti squash
 - **Sample meals**, Whole30 plan: Turkish-style stuffed eggplant with green beans, Buffalo chicken with cumin carrot salad
 - **Sample meals**, Keto Reset plan: pesto tuna cakes with creamy coleslaw, Szechwan chicken with bok choy and spaghetti squash.
 - **Estimated cost:** \$ – \$\$\$

In addition, popular companies like [Blue Apron](#) and [Hello Fresh](#) offer relatively healthy options, but don't make it as easy to identify meals that would work with a diabetes meal plan. Blue Apron, for example, provides nutrition information for each meal, but you would have to determine which meals would work for you.

In a sample week of menus I reviewed, the average carb count was 72 g. You could replace higher-carb meals with lower-carb ones, but you'd have to figure everything out yourself. And isn't having a meal delivery service supposed to save you time?

Recipes

I've always enjoyed cooking and used to love preparing complicated gourmet meals just for fun. I do, however, realize that cooking isn't everyone's idea of a good time! Over the years, I've learned to appreciate recipes that are simple and easy to make. Food doesn't need to be complicated or fussy to be healthy and tasty.

If you're just starting out in the kitchen, these recipes are an easy way to get started — if you can measure and chop, you can make them. And if you're experienced in the kitchen, these recipes might be a great way to mix up your normal routine.

The dishes below represent some of my new favorites that are quick to prep, healthy, and delicious. Feel free to play with the recipes and make them your own — that's what cooking is all about.

For example, if you don't like almonds, use cow's milk or soy milk and chopped walnuts in your spiced overnight oats with applesauce and chia. If you aren't a fan of peppers, try mushrooms instead in the turkey bacon and egg muffins. If shrimp isn't a favorite, stuff your avocado with crab salad or tuna salad instead.

Happy eating!



BREAKFAST

Spiced Overnight Oats with Applesauce & Chia

Nutritional information per serving

Calories: 289

Carbs: 52 g

Sugar: 13 g

Fat: 7 g

Protein: 8 g

Fiber: 9 g

Sodium: 91 mg

Serves: 2

Prep time: 5 minutes

Cook time: 0 minutes

Total time: 8 hours

Ingredients

1 cup rolled *oats*

1 cup unsweetened *almond milk*

1 medium *banana*, mashed

1/2 cup unsweetened *applesauce*

1 tsp. *apple pie spice* or *ground cinnamon*

1 tbsp. *chia seeds*

1 tsp. sliced *almonds*

Directions

1. Combine oats, almond milk, banana, applesauce, apple pie spice, and chia seeds in a glass jar and stir well.
2. Attach lid and refrigerate overnight.
3. Serve cold or heat in microwave for about a minute. Top with sliced almonds.

Tips

If banana doesn't work for your meal plan, leave it out and add a few berries instead in step 3 when you serve the oats. You can also use cow's milk or unsweetened soymilk if you want to up the protein.



BREAKFAST

Turkey Bacon & Egg Muffins

Nutritional information per serving

Calories: 149

Carbs: 2 g

Sugar: 1 g

Fat: 11 g

Protein: 10 g

Fiber: 1 g

Sodium: 309 mg

Serves: 6

Prep time: 10 minutes

Cook time: 30 minutes

Total time: 40 minutes

Ingredients

8 slices *turkey bacon*

1 small *green bell pepper*, minced

1 medium *banana pepper*, minced

1/4 large *onion*, minced

4 large *eggs*

1/4 cup nonfat *milk*

2/3 cup shredded *cheddar cheese*

Directions

1. Slice the bacon in half lengthwise, then crosswise into thin strips. Cook the bacon together with the green pepper, banana pepper, and onion over medium-high heat until the bacon is crisp and the vegetables are soft. Remove from heat and let cool slightly.
2. Preheat the oven to 350°F (180°F). Spray a 6-cup muffin pan with nonstick spray.
3. In a medium bowl, whisk the eggs together with the milk. Divide the egg mixture among the 6 muffin cups. Add 1/6 of the bacon mixture to each cup and top with 1/6 of the cheese.
4. Bake for about 20 minutes or until the eggs have set.

Tips

Chop the bacon, peppers, and onion on prep day. You may substitute other types of peppers for the green and banana peppers. Try a mixture of green and red bell peppers or add jalapeños if you like things spicy. You'll need about 1 cup total of minced peppers.



LUNCH AND DINNER

Shrimp Salad Stuffed Avocado

Nutritional information per serving

Calories: 293	Carbs: 10 g	Sugar: 1 g
Fat: 16 g	Protein: 30 g	
Fiber: 7 g	Sodium: 310 mg	

Serves: 2

Prep time: 15 minutes

Cook time: 0 minutes

Total time: 15 minutes

Ingredients

1/2 tbsp. *avocado oil mayonnaise*, plain
Greek yogurt, or regular *mayonnaise*
1/2 tbsp. white wine *vinegar*
1 tbsp. minced fresh *parsley*
1/2 tsp. grated fresh *ginger*
1 *scallion*, thinly sliced (white and green parts)

1/2 pound *shrimp*, cooked and
cut into bite-sized pieces
1/8 tsp. kosher *salt*
1/8 tsp. freshly ground *pepper*
1 *avocado*
lime wedges

Directions

1. In a medium bowl, combine the mayonnaise, vinegar, parsley, ginger, and scallions. Mix well.
2. Add the shrimp to the dressing mixture and season with salt and pepper.
3. Slice the avocado in half lengthwise and remove the pit. (Do not peel.)
4. Spoon the shrimp salad into each avocado half. Squeeze a wedge of lime over each and serve immediately.

Tips

To make ahead, prepare the recipe through step 2 and refrigerate the shrimp salad. Just before serving, complete steps 3 and 4. If you're watching sodium, you can skip the added kosher salt to cut the sodium to 164 mg per serving. To save time, you can buy a jar or tube of minced ginger from the produce section of your grocery store and use it instead of grating fresh ginger root. You can also substitute 1 teaspoon dried parsley for the fresh parsley.



LUNCH AND DINNER

Slow Cooker Teriyaki Pork with Peanut Sauce

Nutritional information per serving

Calories: 304	Carbs: 8 g	Sugar: 4 g
Fat: 13 g	Protein: 38 g	
Fiber: 1 g	Sodium: 804 mg	

Ingredients

4 pounds boneless *pork loin roast*, trimmed of fat and cut into 8 pieces
2/3 cup *teriyaki sauce*
1/4 cup *rice vinegar*
2 tsp. red pepper *flakes*, optional
5 cloves *garlic*, minced
1/2 cup creamy *peanut butter*

Serves: 12

Prep time: 10 minutes

Cook time: 8 hours

Total time: 8 hours, 10 minutes

Ingredients for garnish

1/2 cup chopped *scallions*
1/4 cup chopped *cashews or peanuts* (unsalted)
2 *limes*, cut into 12 wedges

Directions

1. Coat the slow cooker with nonstick cooking spray. Add the pork in a single layer if you have room, turning pieces cut side up.
2. In a small bowl, mix the teriyaki sauce, rice vinegar, red pepper flakes (if using), and garlic. Pour over the pork in the slow cooker. Cover and cook on low for 8 to 9 hours.
3. Remove the pork from the slow cooker and shred, using two forks. Add the peanut butter to the liquid in the slow cooker and stir until it dissolves. Return the pork to the slow cooker and toss to make sure all meat gets coated with sauce.
4. Garnish each serving with the scallions, nuts, and a squeeze of lime.

Tips

If you're watching sodium, look for low-sodium teriyaki sauce or make your own. Also pick the brand of rice vinegar that's lowest in sodium. If anyone is allergic to nuts (or doesn't like them), remove some of the pork and sauce to a bowl before you stir in the peanut butter and skip the nut garnish.



SNACKS

Cucumber Bites with Hummus and Tomatoes

Nutritional information per serving

Calories: 144

Carbs: 17 g

Sugar: 5 g

Fat: 8 g

Protein: 5 g

Fiber: 4 g

Sodium: 188 mg

Serves: 2

Prep time: 10 minutes

Cook time: 0 minutes

Total time: 10 minutes

Ingredients

1 English (hothouse) *cucumber*

6 mini *tomatoes*

3 ounces roasted *red pepper hummus*

chopped fresh *parsley*, for garnish

Directions

1. Slice the cucumber into rounds. Thinly slice the tomatoes crosswise.
2. Top the cucumber slices with hummus and tomatoes. Sprinkle with parsley.

Tips

Use any flavor of hummus you prefer. I use mini San Marzano tomatoes when I can find them because they have really good flavor, but cherry tomatoes work fine, too. English, or hothouse, cucumbers are the long ones that come wrapped in plastic. I like them because they have thinner skin and fewer seeds than regular cucumbers.



DESSERTS

2-Ingredient Grilled Peaches

Nutritional information per serving

Calories: 94

Fat: 7 g

Fiber: 1 g

Carbs: 8 g

Protein: 1 g

Sodium: 0 mg

Sugar: 7 g

Serves: 4

Prep time: 5 minutes

Cook time: 8 minutes

Total time: 13 minutes

Ingredients

2 large *peaches*

2 tbsp. extra-virgin *olive oil*

Directions

1. Preheat gas grill to medium.
2. Cut each peach in half along its seam. Twist to separate and remove the pit. Brush each peach half with 1/2 tablespoon olive oil.
3. Place the peaches cut side down on the grill. Cook for about 4 minutes without moving. Flip and cook another 4 minutes.
4. Remove the peaches from the grill and slip off the skins, if desired.

Tips

This recipe works equally well with nectarines. Serve the grilled fruit as a side, in a salad, or as a dessert topped with plain yogurt or cream and sliced almonds.

You've got this

While eating well and controlling your blood sugar can seem daunting, the important thing to remember is that it's possible. With a little planning, you can make quick, healthy meals at home and find great options on the go.

And, if you do splurge occasionally, it's OK. Nobody's diet is perfect 100 percent of the time. Don't be hard on yourself — just get back on track as soon as you can.

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About the author

Shelby Kinnaird publishes diabetic-friendly recipes and tips for people who want to eat healthy at [Diabetic Foodie](#), a website often stamped with a “top diabetes blog” label. Her motto is “a diabetes diagnosis is not a dietary death sentence.” Shelby is a passionate diabetes advocate who likes to make her voice heard in Washington, DC, and she leads two [DiabetesSisters](#) support groups in Richmond, Virginia. She has successfully managed her type 2 diabetes since 1999.