

A Diabetes Prevention Diet

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If you've been told that you have pre-diabetes or are at risk developing diabetes, watching what you eat is one of the most important things you can do to take care of your [health](#). What you eat can significantly affect whether diabetes becomes part of your life. Fortunately there are a number of dietary approaches and other resources for preventing diabetes.

Understanding Diabetes

Diabetes affects more than 23 million Americans. An additional 57 million have pre-diabetes, or are at risk for developing the disease. There are two types of diabetes: Type I and Type II. People with Type I diabetes (also called insulin-dependent diabetes) do not produce enough insulin. Insulin is a hormone produced by the pancreas that helps the cells use glucose. People with Type II diabetes (also called non-insulin-dependent or adult onset diabetes) produce enough insulin, but their cells are resistant to insulin. People with both types of diabetes cannot use the glucose circulating in their bloodstream. This leads to a number of secondary complications like kidney failure, nerve damage, blindness and loss of limbs and accelerates their risk for coronary artery disease.

Many people develop pre-diabetes years before developing diabetes. Unless it manifests itself with physical symptoms, most don't know that they have pre-diabetes unless it appears as part of a blood test during an annual physical examination. By the time it's finally caught, it could be too late to prevent full-blown diabetes.

Preventing Diabetes Through Diet

Managing what you eat is one of the easiest and most effective ways to prevent diabetes. Eating a heart-healthy diet of fruits, vegetables and whole grains while cutting down on [foods](#) that contain high levels of cholesterol and saturated fat is an excellent place to start.

People with pre-diabetes need to learn the same principles in designing meal plans as those who have diabetes. The most effective ways to plan meals are the Diabetes Food Pyramid, Create Your Plate and carbohydrate counting. Similar to the USDA Food Pyramid, the Diabetes Food Pyramid divides all food into six categories: (1) grains and starches, (2) vegetables, (3) fruit, (4) milk and dairy products, (5) meat and meat substitutes and (6) fats, sweets and alcohol. It differs from the USDA pyramid in the way that it distributes carbohydrates and proteins. For example, potatoes are grouped along with grains, beans and starchy vegetables because they have similar carbohydrate contents.

The Create Your Plate meal plan divides a dinner plate into three sections. One section encompasses half of the plate. The remaining half is divided into two smaller sections. Fill the large section with non-starchy vegetables like green beans, cauliflower or tomatoes. Fill one of the smaller sections with starchy foods like corn, lima beans or sweet potatoes. Fill the remaining section with meat or meat substitutes like chicken, tuna or eggs.

Carbohydrate counting involves learning how many grams of carbohydrates are contained in the foods you enjoy. Reading packaging labels is the best place to read how many carbohydrates are contained in a single serving. Your doctor or registered dietitian will tell you how many grams of carbohydrates you're allowed per meal and per day. A typical meal might be 45 to 60 grams.

Other Ways to Prevent Diabetes

Diet is an important way to prevent diabetes but it's not the only way. Getting 20 to 30 minutes of aerobic [exercise](#), using large muscle groups, is another way to stimulate the body's cells to take in blood glucose. There are also a number of prescription drugs, like metformin, that are designed to increase the body's sensitivity to insulin.

If you have pre-diabetes, it may not be too late to head off diabetes. Work with your doctor or a registered dietitian to learn ways to manage your blood glucose levels.