

Diabetes Meal Planning Guide

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For anyone who's been diagnosed with diabetes, the thought of learning how to eat all over again may feel overwhelming. It doesn't have to be.

Diabetics are encouraged to learn how to eat a heart-healthy diet to reduce their blood glucose, lower their dependency on prescription drugs and reduce their chances of getting heart disease, hypertension and cancer. There are a number of simple, easy to use approaches that can help them reach their goals. They include the Diabetes Food Pyramid, Create a Plate, carbohydrate counting, food exchanges and the glycemic index.

Diabetes Food Pyramid

The Diabetes Food Pyramid is based on the USDA Food Pyramid model for the general population. The Diabetes Food Pyramid is divided into six levels: 1) grains and starches, 2) vegetables, 3) fruits, 4) milk and dairy products, 5) meat and meat substitutes and 6) fats, sweets and alcohol. The largest group, grains, sits on the lowest level, meaning that it should represent the highest percentage of [foods](#) in the diet. The smallest group, fats and sweets sit on the top of the pyramid, meaning that it represents the lowest percentage of food in the diet.

Unlike the USDA model, the Diabetes Food Pyramid categorizes foods by their carbohydrate content - not their actual classification. For instance, potatoes are put into the same level as grains, beans and starchy vegetables because of their relative amount of carbohydrates.

Create a Plate

The Create a Plate menu plan was developed by the American Diabetes Association to make it easy to combine different types of foods. Start by dividing a typical dinner plate in two by drawing a line across the center of the plate. Divide one half of the plate into quarters. Fill the larger side with non-starchy vegetables like carrots, green beans or spinach. Fill one of the quarters with starchy foods like cereal or pasta. Fill the other quarter with meats or meat substitutes like tuna, chicken or lean meat.

Carbohydrate Counting

Carbohydrate counting is a method of controlling the amount of carbohydrates you eat by adding the total number of carbohydrates in a meal based on their published content. You can learn how many carbohydrates are in a serving of your favorite food by reading the packaging labels. By combining foods that are low in carbohydrates with foods that are high, you'll be able to keep variety in your meals without going hungry. A good place to start is to limit your total carbohydrate intake to 45 to 60 grams per meal. Your doctor or registered dietitian will be able to give you specific guidelines for your unique needs.

Food Exchanges

Another effective way to manage the amount of carbohydrates in your diet is to use food exchange lists. Keeping the concepts of the Diabetes Food Pyramid in mind, exchange one type of food from a list of available choices with another of similar carbohydrate content. For instance, 1/2 cup of cooked vegetables can be exchanged for 1 cup of salad greens or 1/2 cup of vegetable juice. One ounce of turkey can be exchanged for 1 ounce of tuna in water or two egg whites. One small apple can be exchanged for 4 teaspoons of jelly or jam.

The Glycemic Index

The glycemic index (GI) is a good way to control how quickly the carbohydrates

you eat increase your blood glucose levels. The goal is to balance the foods you eat so that your glucose levels remain at a constant level within the normal range. Dates have a relatively high glycemic index of 103. Green peas have an average GI of 48. Yams have a low GI of 37. Learn how to mix foods with a low GI with foods that have a high GI or combine high GI foods with foods higher in protein and fat.