

Eating well in a balanced way for diabetes

If you want to get the foundation of your diet right and ensure that you get all the nutrients your body needs, there is no better place to start than with the eatwell plate which clearly illustrates how much of what you eat should come from each of the five main food groups.

Remember you don't have to follow a special diet if you have diabetes – there is no such thing as a diabetic diet and you can enjoy the same healthy balanced diet that's recommended for everyone else – no specialist foods, different family meals or shops required!

To view the eatwell plate, please visit;

<http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/publication/eatwellplate0907.pdf>

1. Start with the starches

Starchy foods such as bread, cereals, rice, pasta and potatoes will help to control your blood glucose levels and are an important part of a healthy balanced diet. Far from being fattening, gram for gram they contain less than half the calories of fat and are the healthiest source of energy for your body. They should make up a third of your main meals.

Try to choose wholegrain/wholemeal, high fibre or lower Glycaemic Index*(GI) (Web Link – Diet and Diabetes - Glycaemic Index) varieties where possible, as they contain more fibre, B vitamins, vitamin E, zinc and iron and are absorbed more slowly, so won't affect your blood sugar levels as much. They are also more filling than the white varieties. Although there is no official dietary recommendation for wholegrain intake, many health bodies and experts recommend eating three portions of whole grains every day to help keep your heart healthy, aid weight management and prevent type 2 diabetes.

*GI is a measure of how quickly a carbohydrate containing food is absorbed into the bloodstream after eating. Slowly absorbed foods have a low GI rating, whilst foods that are more quickly absorbed will have a high GI rating. This is important because choosing slowly absorbed carbohydrates can help even out blood glucose levels when you have diabetes.

Top tips:

- Try porridge or a high fibre breakfast cereal for breakfast – Weetabix, Oatabix, All-Bran Flakes, natural museli, Shredded Wheat etc. Look out for the wholegrain logo on cereal boxes.
- Use grainy breads such as granary, pumpernickel and rye bread for lunchtime sandwich instead of white.
- Try something new and have wholegrain pasta, brown rice, egg noodles, couscous, bulgar wheat or pearl barley for supper.
- Try sweet potato or yam with your main meal.

2. Fruits and vegetables

We should all be aiming to eat at least five (80g) portions (at least 400g in total) of a wide variety of fruit and vegetables a day – about a third of your total daily food.

As well as looking and tasting great, fruits and vegetables are packed with essential vitamins and minerals that are vital for good health. Fruit and vegetables are also naturally low in fat and calories but high in fibre to help keep you fuller for longer. Fresh, frozen, dried, canned and fruit juices all count.

How much is a portion? A portion is equivalent to 80 grams.

Tasty examples include:

- A banana, medium pear or apple (or similar sized fruit).
- One heaped tablespoon of dried fruit (raisins and apricots).
- A handful of grapes, cherries or berries.
- A dessert bowl of salad.
- Three heaped tablespoons of vegetables (raw, cooked, frozen or tinned).
- A glass (150ml) of fruit or vegetable juice.

- Three heaped tablespoons of beans and pulses (baked or kidney beans).

Top tips:

- Look on food packets for a 5-a-day portion indicator.
- If you are opting for fresh produce go for those in season as they are more likely to be locally grown, are value for money and often look and taste the best.
- Eat a rainbow – variety is important, as different coloured fruits and vegetables contain their own combination of nutrients.
- Try to snack on fresh fruits to try and meet your 5-a-day target – fill a big bowl and put it where you'll notice it.
- Indulge in a smoothie a day. Whizz frozen berries, banana or any fruit, either on its own or with milk or yogurt, in a blender. Drink it slowly or following a meal as it has less fibre than in a piece of fruit and can have more of an effect on your blood glucose levels.
- Sprinkle some dried fruit, such as currants, dates, sultanas and figs over your morning cereal and enjoy with a glass of fresh orange juice.
- Buy a few tupperware pots and pack them full of your favourite raw veggies – cherry tomatoes, button mushrooms, carrots, celery sticks etc., so that you can take food to work, or store it in the fridge for when you are hungry.

Top tips for cooking:

- Rustle up a winter warming casserole, soup or broth – add lentils, peas and beans, or simply use up left over veggies from your fridge.
- Grate carrot into your spaghetti bolognese for a sweet and colourful touch.

3. Milk and dairy foods

Milk and dairy products are a good source of protein and contain a wide range of vitamins and minerals, particularly calcium to help maintain healthy bones.

Try to have three portions a day. A portion could be:

- A 200ml glass of milk
- A small (150g) pot of yogurt or fromage frais
- A 30g or a matchbox sized piece of hard cheese (Cheddar, Camembert, Brie or Edam)
- Two tablespoons of cottage cheese

Top tips:

- The fat content of different dairy foods varies a lot and much of this is saturated fat, which can raise your cholesterol. Switch to reduced fat varieties wherever possible.
- Simple swaps can really cut down on your fat intake:
 1. Use skimmed, 0.75%, 1% fat, semi-skimmed milk or soya milk on your breakfast cereal and in your tea instead of whole milk.
 2. Enjoy fromage frais or yogurt instead of cream.
 3. Make lower fat cheeses part of your cheeseboard, e.g. Edam or have a smaller amount of the full fat variety.
 4. Try using stronger cheese for cooking. You'll find that you won't have to use so much to give it a cheesy flavour. Grated cheese tends to go further too.

4. Meat, fish and non dairy alternatives – eggs, nuts, beans and pulses

These foods are a great source of protein, iron and other minerals which are needed by the body for the growth, maintenance and repair of all our cells – try to consume a couple of portions of lean protein every day.

What's a portion?

- 80–100g (the size of a pack of cards) of lean red meat, beef, pork, lamb or poultry without the skin.
- 140g of white fish (haddock, plaice, coley, cod, hake etc.) or oily fish (sardines, salmon, trout, pilchards, mackerel etc.).
- 1–2 eggs – enjoy scrambled, poached, boiled or as an omelette.
- 150g (about 4 heaped tablespoons) of cooked beans, peas, lentils or dahl.
- 100g of soya mince, tofu or Quorn.
- 40g (about 2 tablespoons) of nuts, peanut butter, seeds or tahini.

Top tips:

- Try adding kidney beans, chickpeas and lentils to your soups, casseroles, salads or curries to help you on your way to 5-a-day.
- Choose lean meat and low fat/vegetarian alternatives wherever you can to reduce your saturated fat intake and help manage your blood cholesterol levels.
- Remove skin and visible fat from meat and poultry.
- Aim for one portion of oily fish a week, rich in omega 3 fats which can help keep your heart healthy.

5. Fat and sugar containing foods

Sugar

Having diabetes does not mean you have to have a sugar-free diet. As long as your everyday diet is healthy and balanced, you can still eat sugar and sugar containing foods in moderation whilst being aware of your blood sugar levels. Table sugar, added sugar or sucrose does not actually raise your blood sugar any more than similar amounts of calories from starchy carbohydrate foods. It is important to remember that sugar is just one type of carbohydrate and that it is your overall carbohydrate intake that counts in keeping your blood sugar under control.

That said, sugar adds flavour and sweetness to foods, but offers no nutritional value. Sugar laden foods such as cakes, biscuits, chocolate and desserts are also often high in fat, so cutting down

could not only help you better manage your long-term blood glucose levels, it could also help you look after your waistline.

Top tips:

- Using sugar-free, no added sugar or diet fizzy drinks/squashes, instead of sugary versions can be an easy way to reduce the sugar in your diet or simply add a little flavour by adding a teaspoon of lemon juice or a splash of fruit juice or elderflower cordial to your water.
- If you have a sweet tooth, try to cut down gradually on the sugar you add to food or a low calorie sweetener. It may be hard to start with, but your taste buds will soon adapt!
- Try simple food swaps: a - : A 330ml can of coca-cola contains 35g sugar (about seven teaspoons of sugar), whereas a diet cola has none.
- Check your food labels when shopping. Look for the carbohydrates (of which sugars). If you spot the ending '-ose' on a word, it'sits sugar in disguise. Examples are sucrose, glucose and fructose.

Per 100g	A lot	A little
Sugar	10g or more	2g or less

- Look at the ingredient list. Ingredient lists always start with the biggest ingredient first. If sugar is near the top of the list, you know that the food is likely to be high in added sugars.
- Buy breakfast cereals only if sugar is not one of the top listed ingredients. Try to stick to wholegrain breakfast cereals that are absorbed more slowly and won't affect your blood glucose levels as much. Add sliced fresh fruit or dried fruit if you crave some extra sweetness.
- Don't make desserts a regular part of every meal. Save them for a special treat or choose one made with fruit and help yourself on your way to your 5-a-day.
- Have healthy mid-morning/afternoon snacks and serve low sugar alternatives to friends at high tea: bagels, wholegrain muffins or fruit scones

can take the place of fashionable cupcakes, biscuits, doughnuts or brownies.

- As far as pure fruit juices go, while they are one of your 5-a-day and can hydrate you, they also contain quite a lot of sugar which can affect your blood glucose levels. Stick to one glass a day and drink it with your meal to slow down its absorption.
- Baking – reduce the sugar content of your baked goodies by cutting back on sugar or by substituting with a low calorie sweetener.
- Forget your chocolate bar, cakes, pastries or biscuits as your mid-morning sugar hit. Instead, beat your sweet cravings by snacking on dried fruit, or nibble on a few unsalted nuts, such as almonds, cashews or brazils. Not too many though as they are high in calories.
- Of course, you can still enjoy social events like parties and picnics. Why not take along a 'contribution', such as raw vegetables and a dip, so you don't have to resort to sugary snacks if nothing else is available.

Know your fats:

Know your fats

We mustn't forget that having some fat in the diet is essential – it helps to maintain your body temperature, protects your body's tissues and organs and plays an essential role in carrying the four fat-soluble vitamins: A, D, E, and K. However, because it tastes so good, it's easy to eat too much and it is high in calories (providing nine calories a gram) which can make you put on weight if the energy is not burnt off during exercise.

Most of us in the UK could benefit from watching the amount of fat that we eat (Web link [Guideline Daily Amounts](#)). On average, women should aim for no more than 70g of fat a day and men no more than 95g of fat a day, but this is not the whole picture. Not all fats are bad for us, and getting the right type of fat into our diets is what counts.

'Bad' saturated fat

If you have diabetes, it is very important to keep the level of cholesterol in your blood well controlled as this will help to reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke. We now know that the most important dietary factor affecting our blood cholesterol levels and heart health is saturated fat and unfortunately most people in the UK are eating too much– 20% more saturated fat than the UK Government recommendations of 20g per day for women and 30g per day for men.

Saturated fat is generally easy to spot as it is mainly hard at room temperature. It is typically from animal sources like full fat dairy products, tropical oils (palm and coconut oil), is hidden in cakes and biscuits. It's also found in processed foods such as pastries, sausages, burgers and meat pies.

One of the easiest ways to cut down on fat and saturated fat is to look closer at food labels and choose lower fat foods:

Per 100g	A lot	A little
Fat	20g or more	3g or less
Saturated fat	5g or more	1.5g or less

You don't need to compromise on taste. There are many delicious foods that you can eat whilst also looking after your blood cholesterol levels and making simple changes to your diet can make a big difference to your saturated fat intake.

Top tips:

- Try to eat grilled, poached, steamed or microwaved food, instead of fried food.
- Use less oil in cooking – try using oil sprays and non stick pans.
- Go for low fat varieties of dairy products and spreads, e.g. skimmed, 1% or semi skimmed milk.
- Choose leaner cuts of meat and remove the visible white fat you see on red meat and the skin from chicken.
- Avoid convenience meals which are often high in fat and saturated fat and try to cook from scratch.

- Limit the amount of red meat that you eat in favour of poultry (without the skin), fish, pulses and eggs as protein sources.
- Be careful and do watch your intake of fried foods, which add extra fat without adding nutrients. Always drain or skim any excess fat or blot with a paper towel.

'Good' unsaturated fats

Cutting back on 'bad' saturated fats and replacing them with moderate amounts of 'good' fats, also known as monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, can help lower your cholesterol and keep your heart healthy, as well as supply you with essential fatty acids that the body cannot make by itself.

'Good' fats include:

- Monounsaturates – olive and rapeseed oils, almonds, avocados and nuts.
- Polyunsaturates – sunflower oils, safflower oils, soya oil, corn oil, sesame and pumpkin seeds, oily fish, and margarines.

Top tips:

- Use olive oil, canola and flaxseed oils in your cooking and in salad dressings, instead of butter, lard or ghee.
- Instead of putting your hand in the biscuit barrel, snack on a few unsalted nuts or dried fruit. Not too many as they are high in calories – aim for around 1oz/25g a day.
- Indulge in a smoked salmon and low fat cream cheese wholegrain bagel for lunch to get one of your recommended servings of oily fish a week.
- Sprinkle almonds over your morning breakfast cereal.

'Bad' trans fats

Trans fats have a similar effect on your blood cholesterol as saturated fat – they can increase your 'bad' low density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol levels and in turn may increase your risk of coronary heart disease.

Trans fats are a type of fat that can either occur naturally in foods such as meat and dairy products or are man-made during the manufacturing process of changing liquid oils into a hard fats (e.g. margarine) by a process called hydrogenation (adding hydrogen to them).

Trans fats are often found in processed food like pastry, cakes, biscuits, fried foods and processed foods. Unfortunately, trans fats don't currently have to be labelled on foods. Check the food ingredients list and look out for the words hydrogenated vegetable oil (HVO) on labels. If we see these words simply try to avoid the food or cut down on it.

The good news is that UK intakes of trans fats are generally well below the recommended level. Many food manufacturers are also now replacing these 'bad' trans fats with fats that are less harmful to our body, but watch some of the fats in takeaway and restaurant food, where there is less control over what goes into the food.

Top tips:

If you want to use a fat for spreading or cooking, try to use either a little amount of butter or better still use olive, nut and seed oils in cooking— all of which don't contain any trans fats and will count towards your healthy unsaturated fat intake.

Cholesterol rich foods

Many people still think that they need to cut down on their intake of foods that naturally contain cholesterol such as eggs, offal (liver, kidney) and shellfish (prawns). Health experts now agree that the biggest dietary influence on cholesterol is saturated fat, not dietary cholesterol.

If you are eating a balanced diet you only need to cut down on dietary cholesterol if you have been told to do so by your doctor or diabetes nurse.