

# What to Eat With Diabetes

What food can help you keep your blood sugar levels in range and feeling better?



Food – and good nutrition – is a tricky and essential component of diabetes management. It can be hard to make food choices that keep your blood sugar levels in range. Wherever you are in your diabetes journey, and regardless of your current eating habits, we’re here to shed light on what healthy eating can look like for people with diabetes.

## WHAT IS NUTRITION?

At diaTribe, we use nutrition to talk about all of our individual food habits. Think about this as the difference between what you eat for a single meal and your overall eating patterns. For example, someone might usually have healthy eating patterns (centered on vegetables and good-for-you fats) but occasionally they might eat a meal that is less healthy (for example, spaghetti and brownies). “Good nutrition” means regularly eating a combination of foods that have positive effects on health.

## WHY IS GOOD NUTRITION IMPORTANT?

Nutrition is important for everyone, with or without diabetes. But for people with diabetes, what you eat greatly affects your blood sugar levels, Time in Range, long-term health outcomes, and your potential for weight gain. Positive eating habits can help lead to positive outcomes and wellness in these areas and beyond.



## WHAT SHOULD PEOPLE WITH DIABETES EAT?

There are many perspectives on nutrition. The most important part of good nutrition is finding an eating pattern that is healthy for you and that fits your needs, circumstances, and lifestyle. To help you navigate nutrition information, here is diaTribe's advice based on both scientific research and personal experiences with diabetes: Reduce "spiky carbs." Spiky carbs are foods that cause blood sugar levels to quickly increase and can create unpredictable swings in your glucose levels. Some examples of spiky carbs include cookies, cakes, ice cream, candy, bread, crackers, chips, breakfast cereal, rice, pasta, soda, and fruit juice. Many of these items are processed and include added sugars – which can spike your blood sugar even more.

Spiky carbs make it much harder to manage your day-to-day blood glucose levels. In the long-term, they are linked to hyperglycemia (high blood sugar levels) that can lead to heart disease and type 2 diabetes progression as well as other health complications.

"Slow carbs," on the other hand, are broken down more slowly in the body and have a more predictable effect on blood sugar levels. Slow carbs include veggies that grow above the ground (like leafy greens, broccoli, tomatoes, and cabbage), beans, and fruit (in moderation).

Finally, low-carb foods are those which usually have little effect on blood sugar. Foods that are low in carbs – such as nuts and dairy products – often contain protein and healthy fats. Some foods have no carbs, because they are primarily made of protein (meats, fish, or eggs) or fat (butter or oils).



## WHEN IT COMES TO CARBS, HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

Nutrition guidelines generally recommend 130 grams of carbohydrates per day for adults without diabetes, but there's no consensus for people with diabetes. diaTribe recommends 100-150 grams per day, which is about 25-30% of a person's daily calories that should come from carbs. This means that if you aim to eat 2,000 calories per day, then about 550 of those calories should come from carbs. We've found that it's easier to stay in range if we limit carbs to 30 grams per meal or snack. You'll have to experiment and find what's right for you and your lifestyle. Counting carbs is the only way to have some idea of how many carbs you consume at each meal.



## HOW CAN YOU MAKE NUTRITION CHANGES?

It's hard to make big changes to what you eat and get those changes to stick in the long run. That's why we recommend starting with small changes. Think about your eating patterns and read the nutrition labels on the foods you eat frequently. This can help you figure out where you want to start. You can also find our list of foods to eat more of and foods to avoid below.

- 1. Pick a key food habit that you want to modify.**
- 2. Commit to making that change for two months (that'll help it stick!).**
- 3. Then make another small change and repeat.**

To gradually reduce spiky carbs, try cutting out foods one at a time. For example, give up juice or soda, or limit eating ice cream to once per week. Be sure to read food labels to see how many carbohydrates and added sugars different food items contain. You'll want to replace spiky carbs with other food sources that contain slow carbs or few carbs.

## WHAT ABOUT FAT?

It's okay for people with diabetes to eat fat, and to replace spiky carbs with foods that contain fat. That said, some types of fat are healthier than others. We recommend limiting saturated fats and replacing them with unsaturated fats, such as those found in the Mediterranean diet. In practice, this means eating more olive oil, nuts, seeds, avocado, and oily fish, and moderating the amounts of red meat and dairy.

## MORE HEALTHY EATING TIPS

**There are many different strategies for healthy eating. Here are some of the basics that you may find helpful.**

- Learn to read food nutrition labels so you know what's in your food and how it could affect your blood sugar.
- Foods high in fiber can help prevent glucose spikes. Fiber is a helpful nutrient found in plant foods (vegetables, fruits, beans, and whole grains) that can slow carbohydrate digestion and help manage blood sugar levels.
- Understanding portion size is important for all types of food and can help you make sure you are eating a balanced diet.
- Build colorful meals to make sure you are getting a wide variety of nutrients. Filling your plate with foods of different colors means a focus on eating lots of veggies and some fruit.
- Drink water to keep your body hydrated.

## OUR LIST: FOODS TO EAT MORE OF, FOODS TO EAT MINDFULLY, AND FOODS TO EAT LESS OF

<b>Eat more:</b> Nutritious foods that often won't affect blood sugar levels	<b>Eat mindfully:</b> Nutritious foods that may affect your blood sugar and other markers of health	<b>Eat less:</b> Foods that can spike your blood sugar and harm your health
Non-starchy vegetables, especially green veggies and veggies that grow above ground  Nuts and seeds Beans, hummus Soy beans and tofu Eggs  Lean protein – chicken and fish  Olive oil Avocado  Whole grains (such as quinoa, brown rice, and wild rice)	Fruit, especially berries Red meat Plain yogurt or kefir  Dairy products: milk, cheese, cottage cheese, sour cream, and butter  Steel cut oatmeal Sweet potato Carrots Sweet corn Whole wheat pasta Low-carb bread products	Sugar and honey Cakes, cookies, ice cream Candy Sweetened yogurts Regular soda (avoid) Fruit juice (avoid) White rice Bread Potatoes Crackers Breakfast cereal Chips Dried fruits Processed foods Packaged foods with long ingredient lists Alcohol

### MORE INFORMATION ON NUTRITION:

- **Eating Fruit with Diabetes**
- **Dietary Fat: The Good, The Bad, and The In-Between**
- **Protein and Diabetes: What You Need to Know**
- **What's Cholesterol and Why is it Important?**

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