



FACT SHEET:

Healthy food choices

Healthy eating, along with regular physical activity, can help you look after your diabetes. It can also help you manage other risk factors like high blood pressure, or unhealthy cholesterol and triglyceride levels.

Healthy eating for people with diabetes is no different from what is recommended for everyone. There is no need to prepare separate meals or buy special foods. Your whole family can enjoy the same healthy meals.

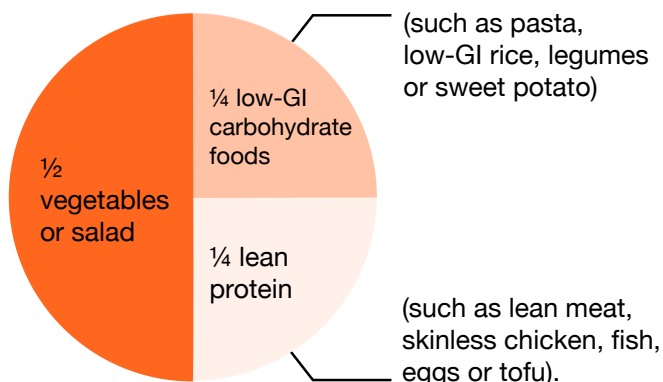
There are many types of eating plans that may be suitable for people with diabetes. These include Mediterranean-style diets, low fat plant-based diets or lower carbohydrate (carb) eating plans.

The following guidelines are general recommendations suitable for most people with diabetes. A dietitian can help you to develop an eating plan to meet your personal food preferences and nutritional needs.

To make healthy food choices:

- Eat regular meals to assist with managing energy and blood glucose levels.
- Choose high-fibre, lower glycemic index (GI) carb foods.
- Limit foods that are high in saturated fat and choose healthier fats.
- Include lean protein foods with your meals.

- Choose foods low in added salt (sodium).
- Avoid adding salt to your food.



Eat regular meals in the right amounts

Aim to eat 3 meals during the day. Choose serving sizes to meet your energy needs.

When preparing a healthy meal aim to:

- Fill 1/2 of your plate with a variety of non-starchy vegetables or salad.

- Fill ¼ of your plate (a palm-sized serving) with a lean protein source, such as lean meat, skinless poultry, fish, seafood, tofu, tempeh, legumes or eggs.
- Fill ¼ of your plate with a nutritious high fibre carb food that has a lower GI, such as wholegrain or legume pasta or noodles, brown rice, quinoa, soba or mung bean noodles, legumes (such as chickpeas, kidney beans, lentils), barley, freekeh, corn, low-GI potato or sweet potato.

Include some healthy fats and oils as part of a balanced meal. Try olive oil in cooking or as a salad dressing, avocado as a spread or nuts and seeds in a stir-fry or salad.

Choose high-fibre, lower GI carbs

Carb foods are the main source of energy for your body. Your body breaks down carbs from food into glucose. Next, the glucose enters your bloodstream and is used by the body cells for energy. Glucose from carb foods is our body's preferred fuel source. Nutritious carb foods provide fibre and resistant starch for a healthy digestive system as well as many vitamins and minerals.

Foods that contain carbs include:

- breads, cereals and other grains or starchy foods, like rice, quinoa and pasta
- starchy vegetables, like potato, sweet potato and corn
- legumes such as lentils, chickpeas and dried or canned beans
- fruit and fruit products such as dried fruit and fruit juice
- dairy products, like milk and yoghurt
- sugary foods and drinks
- other sweet foods, like honey, maple syrup and other syrups.

Eating the right type and amount of carb foods will help you manage your blood glucose levels.

Include a small amount of carb food at each meal to spread what you eat evenly across the day. This can help to maintain your energy levels without causing blood glucose levels to rise above

or drop below your target range. Everyone has different nutritional needs. Talk to your dietitian about the amount of carb that is right for you. If you take insulin, it is important to match your insulin dose and insulin type to your carb intake.

There are different types of carbs. Some carbs break down into glucose quickly and some break down slowly. The GI ranks how slowly or quickly carb foods affect blood glucose levels. High-GI carb foods break down into glucose quickly. This means a higher and faster rise in blood glucose levels after eating.

Low-GI carb foods break down into glucose slowly. This means a smaller and slower rise in blood glucose levels after eating compared with high-GI foods. The best carb choices are high in fibre and have a lower GI, such as dense grainy or seeded breads, oats, grains such as barley and quinoa, legumes, and most fruits.

See the 'sample one-day meal plan' for one example of how to make the best carb food choices and how to spread these out over the day.

Sugar and sweeteners

Sugar is also a type of carb. A healthy eating plan can include a small amount of sugar, such as a teaspoon of sugar in a cup of tea or coffee, or a teaspoon of honey on porridge.

It is important to consider the nutritional value and the amount of the foods you eat. High-sugar foods such as sweets, lollies and regular soft drinks provide no nutritional benefit. They can cause your blood glucose level to rise above your target range. They can also lead to weight gain and poor health.

Alternative sweeteners are not necessary. They do not provide any nutrition but some people may still choose to use these to add sweetness without adding sugar and energy (kilojoules).

If you choose to use sweeteners, be aware that swapping sugar for a sweetener in a recipe or buying products labelled 'sugar-free' may not be a healthier choice. Some sweeteners can also affect your blood glucose levels.

There are many different alternative sweeteners available. Always check the nutrition information to make sure the product meets your needs,

or ask a dietitian. All of the sweeteners approved for sale in Australia have been tested and deemed safe for use by Food Standards Australia New Zealand.

Limit foods high in saturated fat and choose healthy fats

It is important to consider both the amount and the type of fat you eat. The main types of fat found in food are saturated, trans and unsaturated fats.

Saturated fats and trans fats

Saturated fats make it more difficult for the body's insulin to work properly. They raise the level of low-density lipoprotein (also known as LDL or 'bad' cholesterol) in your blood. It is best to limit these in your eating plan and replace them with healthier fats. Saturated fat is in animal foods like fatty meat, full-fat dairy foods, butter and cream. Saturated fats are also in some plant sources such as palm oil and coconut oil. Many take-away and processed foods are high in saturated fat.

Trans fats can raise your blood LDL cholesterol and lower your high-density lipoprotein levels (also known as HDL or 'good' cholesterol). Most trans fats form during food manufacturing. They are in fried foods and baked goods like biscuits, cakes and pastries.

Check the ingredients list for 'hydrogenated oils' or 'partially hydrogenated vegetable oils' Avoid foods that contain these as they are likely to be high in trans fats.

Unsaturated fats

Unsaturated fats include polyunsaturated fats and monounsaturated fats. These are healthier fats. They help to reduce your LDL cholesterol levels and increase your HDL cholesterol levels. Replace saturated fats with unsaturated fats to help keep your blood vessels healthy and reduce your risk of heart disease.

Polyunsaturated fats include:

- the fat found in oily fish, such as mackerel, sardines, salmon and tuna (omega-3 fats)
- nuts and seeds such as walnuts, brazil nuts, pine nuts, sesame and sunflower seeds, chia seeds and flaxseeds

- sunflower, safflower, soybean, corn, cottonseed, grapeseed and sesame oils.

Monounsaturated fats include:

- avocado
- nuts and seeds such as almonds, cashews, hazelnuts, macadamias, pecans, peanuts and pistachios
- olive, canola, peanut and macadamia oils.

Get the right balance of healthy fats

- Choose reduced or low-fat milk, yoghurt and cheese.
- Choose lean meat, trimmed of fat, and skinless cuts of chicken.
- Limit butter, lard, dripping, cream, sour cream, copha, coconut milk and coconut cream.
- Choose olive, sunflower, canola or other unsaturated oils for cooking and salad dressings.
- Limit pastries, cakes, puddings, chocolates, packaged biscuits and savory snacks to special occasions.
- Limit the use of processed deli meats (like salami) and sausages.
- Limit fatty take-away foods, such as chips, fried chicken, battered fish, pies and pastries.
- Snack on a handful of unsalted nuts, or add some nuts to a stir-fry or salad.
- Spread avocado on sandwiches and toast rather than butter, or add to a salad.
- Use natural nut and seed spreads instead of butter on toast.
- Eat fish 2-3 times a week (especially oily fish).

Include lean protein foods

Protein foods are an important part of a balanced meal. They can help you feel fuller for longer and provide other important nutrients including iron, zinc and vitamin B12. Protein foods include meat, poultry, fish or seafood, eggs, nuts, seeds, dairy products, soy products such as tofu and tempeh, and legumes including dried beans and lentils. Choose lean sources of protein foods.

Choose foods low in added salt and avoid adding salt to your food

Eating too much salt (sodium) is not good for your health. It can result in high blood pressure. If your blood pressure is already high, cutting down on salt may help to lower it, and reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke.

Limit your salt intake by choosing more fresh foods that are naturally low in sodium. Look for low-salt or salt-reduced options when buying packaged foods. Avoid adding salt to foods during cooking or before eating. To add flavour without salt, use a wide variety of herbs, spices and condiments (such as lemon or lime juice and vinegar).

Eat plenty of vegetables

Eating plenty of vegetables is important for good health. Most vegetables are low in carbs and kilojoules and will have no or very little effect on your blood glucose levels. They are good sources of fibre, vitamins and minerals.

Eat a variety of different coloured vegetables and salads, such as tomatoes, cucumber, celery, mushrooms, capsicum, onions, cauliflower, zucchini, broccoli, spinach, peas, cabbage, lettuce, green beans, eggplant, carrot, leek, squash, pumpkin and Asian greens.

What to drink

It is important to stay hydrated throughout the day. Water is the best drink, but alternatives include:

- plain mineral or soda water flavoured with sliced lemon or lime, frozen berries, cucumber or fresh mint
- black, oolong, green or herbal tea
- coffee or decaffeinated coffee with skim, low- fat milk or unsweetened plant milk.

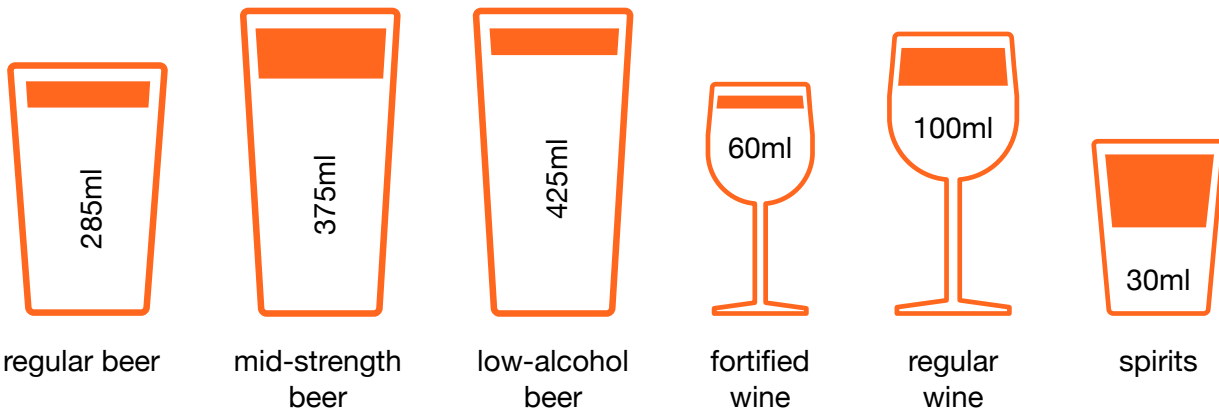
An occasional diet cordial or diet soft drink may add variety without extra sugar or kilojoules.

If you drink alcohol, limit your intake

If you drink alcohol, current guidelines recommend no more than 10 standard drinks per week and no more than 4 standard drinks on any one day. This recommendation is the same for people with or without diabetes. The less you drink, the lower your risk of harm from alcohol.

A standard drink contains 10 gram (g) of alcohol. It's important to know what a standard drink is for different types of alcohol, so you can monitor your intake.

Standard drinks



One standard drink is equal to:

- 285 ml of regular beer
- 375 ml of mid-strength beer
- 425 ml of low-alcohol beer (less than 3% alcohol)
- 60 ml of fortified wine
- 100 ml of wine
- 30 ml of spirits.

If you are taking insulin or certain diabetes tablets, you are at risk of alcohol-related hypoglycaemia (also known as hypo or low blood glucose level). A hypo is when blood glucose levels drop below 4 mmol/L. Hypos can occur while drinking alcohol or many hours afterwards. Hypos can be dangerous. To reduce your risk of hypos, drink alcohol with a meal or snack that contains carbs and check your blood glucose levels regularly.

Sample one-day meal plan

The foods that contain carbohydrate are highlighted in **bold**.

Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner	Snacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of cooked rolled oats with milk, topped with fresh berries OR • 2 thin slices of wholegrain toast, thinly spread with peanut butter, avocado or ricotta, and tomato or boiled or poached eggs OR • 1 cup fresh fruit salad topped with 100 g low fat natural yoghurt • tea, coffee or water. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 thin slices of wholegrain bread or 1 grainy bread roll with thinly spread avocado or hummus • salad vegetables • 1 small serve of lean meat, skinless poultry, tinned fish, eggs, marinated tofu or fat-reduced cheese • water or sparkling mineral water. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • palm-sized serve (100 g) of lean meat, skinless poultry, fish, seafood, 2 eggs, 170 g firm tofu or 1 cup legumes • 1½ cups of cooked vegetables OR 2 cups of salad • 1 cup of cooked pasta OR $\frac{2}{3}$ cup of low-GI rice OR • 1 cup of sweet potato or corn OR • 1 cup of chickpeas or kidney beans • water or sparkling mineral water. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 piece of fresh fruit OR • 1 tub of low-fat natural yoghurt OR • 1 cup of low-fat milk OR • 1 slice of wholegrain bread OR • 2 tablespoons hummus with and celery • 30 g of unsalted nuts.

Healthy snacks

Some people with diabetes may need to include a carb-based snack between meals. This will depend on your body weight, physical activity levels and the type of medication or insulin you take to manage your diabetes.

A dietitian can work with you to find out whether you need to include snacks and the best choices to make, but some suggestions include:

- 1 serve of fresh fruit
- 1 small glass of low-fat milk
- 1 small tub of low-fat natural or unsweetened yoghurt
- 2-3 wholegrain crisp bread spread with ricotta cheese, natural peanut butter or avocado.



More information and support

- Go to [ndss.com.au](https://www.ndss.com.au) to search for the 'Glycemic index', 'Understanding food labels', 'Alternative sweetener', 'Alcohol' and other fact sheets.
- Go to [ndss.com.au](https://www.ndss.com.au) to access the Carb Counting program online and other NDSS programs and services in your state or territory, or online.
- Go to [dietitiansaustralia.org.au](https://www.dietitiansaustralia.org.au) to find a dietitian or call Dietitians Australia on **1800 812 942**.
- For information about standard drinks, go to [health.gov.au/health-topics/standard-drinks](https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/standard-drinks).
- For more information on glycemic index visit [glycemicindex.com](https://www.glycemicindex.com) or [gisymbol.com](https://www.gisymbol.com).



Top tips

- Healthy eating for people with diabetes is the same as what is recommended for everyone. There is no need to prepare separate meals or buy special foods. Your whole family can enjoy the same healthy meals.
- There are many types of eating plans that may be suitable for people with diabetes. One size does not fit all.
- Talk to a dietitian to develop an eating plan that meets your food preferences and nutritional needs. A dietitian can also advise you about serving sizes and snacks.

Notes

The NDSS and you

Whether you have just been diagnosed with diabetes, or have been living with diabetes for a while, the NDSS provides a range of support services, information, and subsidised products to help you manage your diabetes, stay healthy and live well. For access to more resources (including translated versions), or to find out more about support services, go to [ndss.com.au](https://www.ndss.com.au) or call the NDSS Helpline on **1800 637 700**.

This information is intended as a guide only. It should not replace individual medical advice and if you have any concerns about your health or further questions, you should contact your health professional.