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Diets for Diabetics

While diabetes can't be cured, it can be controlled. If you have diabetes, your diet is the key to your continued good health. You should concentrate on eating healthy foods and minimize eating foods high in sugar or high in fat. It's also a good idea to eat moderately sized, balanced meals at regular times every day—perhaps more frequently than the traditional large meals served in the "three-times-per-day" fashion. If you take medications, you may also need a snack at certain times, such as in the evening. Losing weight can help you control your diabetes, too. Ask your doctor, dietitian, or health care professional if you aren't sure about how these suggestions apply to you.

Having diabetes does not mean you have to shop for special or expensive foods. All of the foods you need can be purchased at your local supermarket. Also, you do not need to eat differently from the rest of your family. The food guidelines for diabetes result in good nutrition that would be suitable for anyone.

Over the course of a day, you should include selections from each of the following food pyramid groups: the milk group, the meat and protein group, the fruit group, the vegetable group, and the bread and cereal group. Serving sizes may be smaller than you are used to. For example, a recommended serving of protein is only three ounces; that's less than a quarter-pound beef patty. The number of servings you choose each day depends on the amount of calories you need to maintain a desirable weight and to keep your blood glucose levels under control. Again, your doctor or health care professional can help you determine this.

Good choices from the milk group include nonfat or low-fat milk, lower-fat cheeses, and nonfat plain or artificially sweetened yogurt. Keep in mind that adults need two to three servings from the milk group each day.

From the meat group, you should select two to three servings of the following each day: lean meats, skinless chicken or turkey, fish and seafood, tofu, peas, or beans, such as pinto beans or lentils.

You should also eat three to five servings of vegetables and two to four servings of fruit every day. Fruits should be fresh or canned without syrup.

Finally, breads, unsweetened cereals, grains, tortillas, and crackers are also healthy choices—especially if you choose whole grain products. You should eat 6 to 11 servings from the bread and cereal group each day, too. The number you choose will depend on your weight and whether or not you need to lose weight. Go easy on the amount of bakery items you eat, such as sweet breads, donuts, potato chips, and pastries.

In general, keep the fat in your diet low—especially if you need to lose weight or control your cholesterol level. However, some fats are more heart-healthy than others. Choose fats that are polyunsaturated or monounsaturated, such as olive oil or canola oil.

It's also important to watch your sugar intake, especially if you need to lose weight. While some sugar is okay, some people need to cut down on sugar, including sugar-heavy beverages, syrups, cake, and candy. Drink water, diet soda, or calorie-free beverages; use artificial sweeteners, such as Equal, Nutrasweet, or Saccharin; and limit desserts. Most diabetics should have no more than one alcoholic drink per day, and it should be consumed along with a meal. This is possible only if your diabetes is in good control. You'll want to discuss this with your doctor or health care professional.

If you eat right, you may not need to take vitamin or mineral supplements. In fact, too much of some vitamins can be harmful. If you are consuming less than 1,500 calories a day, if you are pregnant, or if you have had surgery or a prolonged illness, taking a multivitamin that provides 100 percent of the Recommended Daily Allowances may be helpful. Consult your doctor or health care professional before taking more than these amounts.



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The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care. If you have persistent health problems or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor or other health care professional.

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