

Nutrition for Diabetes

Diabetes is a disease in which the body doesn't properly make or use insulin, a hormone necessary for keeping our blood sugar levels within a normal range. Over time, if diabetes goes untreated or is not well managed, high blood sugar levels may cause damage to the heart, kidneys, eyes, and/or nerves. When it comes to treating diabetes, there is no "one size fits all" plan so it is important to work with your registered dietitian or qualified health professional to find a treatment plan that works best for your needs.

In addition to regular physical activity, following a healthy eating plan can help to control blood sugar and help you to maintain a healthy weight. Many are surprised to learn that a diabetes friendly diet is simply a healthy, balanced diet. With these nutrition tips, you will be able to make healthier food choices and better manage your blood sugar:

- **Be carbohydrate conscious-** Foods that contain carbohydrates increase blood sugar levels. These include fruits, starchy vegetables including potatoes and corn, milk and yogurt, breads, cereals, rice, pasta, and snack foods like crackers, chips and cookies. Many beverages also contain carbohydrates such as sodas, sweetened teas, waters and coffee drinks and fruit juices. It is important to include healthy carbohydrates such as fruit starchy vegetables, milk and yogurt, and whole grains in your diet because they provide important nutrients, however to keep your blood sugar levels within a healthy range, pay attention to how many carbohydrates you eat and aim to eat consistent amounts at each meal and each day.
- **Focus on fiber-** Fiber is a type of carbohydrate that slows digestion and the rate at which sugar is absorbed into our blood which may help to control blood sugar levels. In addition, eating foods with fiber can help us to feel fuller, which may help with maintaining a healthy weight. Fiber may also help to lower cholesterol and reduce the risk for heart disease. To increase your intake of fiber rich foods, eat more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans and lentils, and nuts and seeds.
- **Avoid skipping meals and plan ahead-** Before heading to the grocery store, plan out your meals and snacks for the week. This will help you stick to a healthy eating plan and avoid skipping meals or visits to the drive thru window.
- **Read food labels-** It is important to familiarize yourself with the foods that you are eating to be successful at managing your diabetes and maintaining a healthy weight. Food labels are a great tool to help you choose healthy foods and identify the amount of carbohydrate a food contains as well as calories, saturated and trans-fat and sodium. While reading labels, pay attention to serving size as there may be multiple servings per package. A good rule of thumb is to choose foods that are higher in fiber and protein, but lower in added sugar and sodium.
- **Avoid portion distortion-** Food labels are very helpful, but they are not always available. To help you stick to your meal plan when food labels are not available, learn about portion sizes so you can estimate the amount of food you are eating. For example, a 3 ounce portion of meat = a deck of cards, 1 cup = a baseball or small fist, ½ cup = a tennis ball, 1 tablespoon = a poker chip.
- **Follow the Plate Method-** The American Diabetes Association recommends using the "plate method" to help manage both diabetes and weight. To do this, when eating meals, imagine cutting your plate in half. Fill one half with non-starchy vegetables such as spinach, broccoli, cauliflower or green beans. Then cut the other half into 2 halves filling one section with one serving of a starchy food such as a whole grain roll, baked potato, rice, corn, pasta or bread. Then fill the other section with a serving of lean meat such as skinless chicken breast, salmon, beef sirloin, deli meat such as turkey or ham or low fat cheese. Lastly, add a piece of fruit and incorporate dairy as you choose either as a glass of milk, serving of yogurt, or

cheese as part of the meal.

- Choose heart healthy foods- Those with diabetes are at an increased risk for heart disease and stroke, but the good news is that following a heart healthy diet can help reduce this risk. This includes reducing your intake of saturated and trans-fats, and sodium. To do this, eat a diet that is rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, dairy foods, and lean meats and fish.
- What about sweets? Sweets and treats should be enjoyed in moderation according to the serving size and part of a healthy balanced diet.

This medical and/or nutritional information is not intended to be a substitute for individual advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition.