

Diabetes Diet: Build Your Healthy Meal Plan

Written by [WebMD Editorial Contributors](#)

Medically Reviewed by [Michael Dansinger, MD](#) on August 12, 2022

What Is a Diabetes Diet?

While there is no specific diet for people with diabetes, your diabetes diet is an eating plan that covers three important areas: Healthy foods in healthy amounts, eaten with healthy timing in mind.

It helps you control your blood sugar, maintain a healthy weight, and keep your risk of heart disease low.

This way of eating can prevent, control, and may even reverse the disease -- and it's not just for people with diabetes.

Diabetes Diet Recommended Foods

There are four types of nutrients in food that can affect your blood sugar:

1. Carbohydrates (the sugars, starches, and fiber in food)
2. Protein
3. Fat
4. Fiber

Carbohydrates raise blood sugar faster than proteins or fats. They also have the biggest effect on your blood sugar. Fiber, protein, and fat may curb the rise in blood sugar after a meal.

So aim for variety. Eat a mixture of carbohydrates, protein, and fat to manage your blood sugar better and stay full longer. But make sure to choose *quality* carbohydrates and smart fats that are:

- Fiber-rich: Vegetables, certain fruits (bananas and mangos are *the worst choices*), nuts, beans, peas, whole grains
- Heart Healthy: Fish like salmon and tuna--*not shellfish, like shrimp*
- Healthy carbs: Vegetables, beans, whole grains, and some fruit (avoid bananas & mangos especially)
- Smart fats: Fish, nuts and seeds, avocado, olives, extra virgin olive oil, and canola oil

Check your blood sugar after meals. Look for patterns between what you eat and drink and your blood sugar levels after. You also may want to track how many grams or servings of carbohydrates you eat with each meal and try to keep it about the same from meal to meal. This can also help you take charge of your blood sugar.

Diabetes Diet Foods to Avoid

Saturated Fats: Saturated fat raises your blood cholesterol. You can find it in high-fat animal protein like bacon and sausage, high-fat dairy like butter, full-fat cheese, and ice cream, plus coconut oil and chicken skin.

Trans Fats: Also called hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oil, trans fats are liquid oils that become a solid fat. Ingredients like stick margarines and shortening contain trans fats, as do processed foods like some chips, cookies, and fast food French fries.

Cholesterol: Your cholesterol count is made up of the natural cholesterol in your blood, plus the cholesterol that comes from food. Watch out for high-fat dairy and high-fat animal products, plus egg yolks, shrimp & other shellfish, and liver & other organ meats.

Sodium: Don't forget to watch salt, too. That's part of healthy eating with diabetes. Eating less sodium has been shown to help prevent and treat high blood pressure. Read labels and choose foods that are low in sodium. Learn more about [reading food labels and grocery shopping with diabetes](#).

Creating a Diabetes Meal Plan

Eating a healthy, balanced diet when you have diabetes doesn't mean you can't eat foods that taste good. In the sample menu and recipes below, the meals have a good balance of protein and fat and a great source of fiber. You can plug them into your diet -- in the right portion sizes -- along with the other fruit, vegetables, grains, dairy, protein, or fats in your plan.

Breakfast example

Here's how you might work in a high-fiber carbohydrate along with some lean protein and "good" fat.

High-fiber carbs:

- Whole-grain cereal (hot or cold) with a small amount of fruit (NOT bananas or mangos)
- Whole-grain bread, English muffin, or bagel
- Whole-grain waffles or pancakes with fruit (NOT bananas or mangos)

Lean protein (low in saturated fat):

- A higher omega-3 egg blended with 2 egg whites for an egg dish. Add vegetables such as spinach, broccoli, or tomatoes.
- Low-fat milk or soy milk for your cereal or as a beverage
- Part skim-milk cheese added to your omelet
- Low-fat or nonfat yogurt with fruit or cereal, or in a smoothie

Smart fats:

- Avocado added to your omelet
- Nuts for cereals or a yogurt parfait
- Extra virgin olive oil used in omelet
- Canola oil used in whole-grain muffins, pancakes, or waffles

Lunch example

A sandwich or wrap with whole-grain bread or tortilla and a lean protein such as:

- Roasted turkey, skinless chicken, or lean beef or pork
- Part skim-milk cheese or soy cheese
- Water-packed tuna dressed in vinaigrette, yogurt, or light mayo

A bean-based lunch such as:

- Bean burrito with whole-grain tortilla
- Hummus with whole grain-bread or vegetable dippers
- Vegetarian or lean-meat chili or bean stew

Main-course salad made with:

- Dark green lettuce
- Lots of vegetables
- Lean meat, fish, beans, or cheese plus avocado and nuts, if desired
- Dressing made with extra virgin olive oil, canola oil, or yogurt

Dinner example

High-fiber carb choices:

- Cooked grains like brown rice, quinoa, barley, bulgur, or amaranth
- Whole wheat bread, tortilla, pita bread, or buns
- Colorful vegetables on the side or in the main course
- Dark green lettuce for a side or dinner salad
- Fresh fruit (NOT bananas or mangos) on the side or with the entrée

Lean protein (low in saturated fat):

- Grilled or baked fish (not shellfish), by itself or in a mixed dish such as tacos
- Skinless poultry -- grilled, baked, or stir-fried
- Lean beef or pork -- sirloin, tenderloin -- with no visible fat (marbling)
- Part skim-milk cheese in entrees, such as eggplant parmesan, vegetarian pizza on whole wheat crust, vegetable lasagna, or enchiladas

Smart fats:

- A sensible amount of extra virgin olive oil or canola oil used for cooking
- Nuts added to entrée or side dishes
- Avocado or olives with entrée or side dishes

Healthy Snacks examples

- Cucumber slices with hummus
- Canned tuna on whole grain crackers
- Frozen grapes (not too many!)
- Apples with peanut or almond butter
- Popcorn is a whole grain

A Few Surprises

It comes as a shock to almost everyone to learn that **bananas and mangos** are extremely high in sugars and should be avoided. Instead, dark berries are generally the best fruits to consume.

Skim milk has just as much sugar as whole milk--only the fat has been removed. Coconut, oat, and almond "milks" all have less sugar than cow's milk *as long as they are unsweetened*.