

Eating Well with Diabetes

Diabetes is a condition where there is an excess of glucose (sugar) in the blood stream. People with diabetes are recommended to follow a careful dietary regime, together with exercise and medication if needed to keep blood glucose levels within the normal range and to prevent complications of diabetes.

Older, frail individuals may be advised to follow a more relaxed regime which we will discuss later.

There are various forms of diabetes:

- Type 1 Diabetes - usually diagnosed in childhood- people will require insulin injections for life.
- Type 2 Diabetes - there is a lack of insulin production, or the insulin is not well recognized by the body. It usually controlled with lifestyle change but may require medication or even insulin eventually.
- Insulin Resistance - may be a precursor to Type 2 diabetes, with changes to the way the body manages insulin and glucose, but blood glucose levels (BGLs) have not yet risen too high.

In all types of diabetes there is a balance between the foods that are eaten and the insulin that is produced by the body or injected. When food is eaten, some of it, especially the foods containing carbohydrate (sugar or starch) is broken down to glucose which acts as a fuel for our body cells (like the petrol in your car). Insulin is the hormone allows the glucose in the blood to enter the body cells. The amount of glucose in the blood must be just right; it cannot be too high or too low. This balance between the food eaten and the insulin that is available is different for every person and advice from a doctor as well as dietitian, diabetes educator and other health providers is recommended.

There is no cure for diabetes however people with diabetes can still live long, healthy lives. Eating the right foods and being active will help to keep a control blood glucose levels.

The approach to dietary management of diabetes for individuals who are older, and more frail is more relaxed, and guidelines have changed in the last few years. In the past, recommendations were very prescriptive with a strong emphasis on avoiding even small amounts of sugar. It has now been found that the previous “diabetic diet” provided no long-term benefits for blood glucose control in the very elderly. Advice is now more individual. It is more important to include adequate protein, energy and nutrients in food that people enjoy to eat. The main focus might be on meeting the overall nutritional needs, rather than tight control of blood glucose levels. Sometimes additional medication may be used if blood sugars are high.

The recommended meal patterns for optimal diabetes control include:

1. Eat a balanced diet

- Include foods from each of the food groups in your diet - wholegrain breads and cereals, vegetables, fruits, milk and milk products and meat and meat alternatives.
- Any diet that recommends avoidance of entire food groups is never recommended.

EXCELLENCE

QUALITY

LEADERS

INTEGRITY

PO Box 746
Glenelg 5048

P: 08 8227 1000
F: 08 8227 1200

admin@npagroup.com.au
www.npagroup.com.au



2. Control your weight

- You should aim to achieve a healthy weight for your height. If you are overweight, even losing a few kilograms can greatly improve blood glucose levels. This must be done very carefully when you are older, as any weight loss without also including exercise can result in loss of muscle, not fat.

This can result in loss of strength and declining health.

- Any weight loss without trying is something to be wary of. The goal should be to lose a small amount of weight over a long period of time if needed and preferably under the advice of an Accredited Practising Dietitian.
- Sometimes maintaining a steady weight is the best option.

3. Keep active

- Physical activity helps to lower blood glucose levels.
- Aim to be active every day.
- Aim to include something that you enjoy. E.g. One thirty minute walk in the morning or after dinner, or three ten minute walks during the day would be a great start.

4. Spread carbohydrate foods over the day

- Carbohydrate foods are the primary foods that affect the day-to-day blood glucose levels.
- Whilst low or no carbohydrate diets appear to be popular, it is not necessary to avoid all carbohydrates to keep BGLs in the normal range. They should be eaten in moderate amounts and spread out over the day.
- You may need to eat smaller meals and include small snacks between meals, particularly if there is a long gap between eating.

5. Include low GI foods at every meal.

- Aim to eat low glycemic index carbohydrate foods that take longer to digest, such as wholegrain bread, muesli, porridge, baked beans, apples, etc.

6. Increase fibre intake

- Fibre is important in the diet as it helps to maintain good bowel function.
- High fibre foods in the diet will help to keep you full and will also regulate blood glucose levels to keep them within a healthy range.
- Foods such as wholegrain breads and cereals, fruit and vegetables, nuts, seeds and legumes are all high fibre foods.

7. Limit excess sugar

- While it is acceptable to eat some sugar in your diet, large amounts of sugar should be avoided.
- Choose fruits that naturally have sugar in them, rather than soft drinks, cakes or chocolate which have a lot of added sugar.

8. Decrease saturated fat levels in the diet

- Try to reduce your saturated fat intake where possible, as large amounts may increase blood cholesterol levels.
- Saturated fats are found in animal fats like meat, full cream milk products, cheese and butter as well as palm and coconut oils that are found in biscuits, pastries and deep-fried foods.

EXCELLENCE

QUALITY

LEADERS

INTEGRITY

PO Box 746
Glenelg 5048

P: 08 8227 1000
F: 08 8227 1200

admin@npagroup.com.au
www.npagroup.com.au

