



# Diabetes and food

## What is Type 2 Diabetes?

Type 2 Diabetes is a condition where the body is unable to control its own blood glucose (sugar) levels effectively, so they can become too high. This occurs when the pancreas does not produce enough insulin, or the insulin made does not work properly.

## Should I follow a “Diabetic diet”?

There is no such thing as a “Diabetic Diet”. People with diabetes are encouraged to eat a well balanced, nutritious diet as recommended for those without diabetes. It should be low in saturated fat, high in fibre and include a variety of fruit and vegetables. There is no need to completely cut out all of your favourite foods when you have diabetes, however if they are high in fat / sugar then it is advisable to reduce your intake of these. Sticking to regular meals and a couple of nutritious snacks should allow you to meet your nutritional requirements.

## What is a balanced diet?

The foods we eat can be divided into five key groups as shown in the Eatwell guide below. We should aim to include all of these food groups in our diet, as no single food group can give us all the nutrients we need. Portion sizes are also important.



## Fruit and vegetables

- Contain vitamins, minerals and fibre
- There are no fruit and vegetables that you can't eat when you have diabetes
- Aim for 5 portions per day, there is no limit on non-starchy vegetables but limit fruit to 3 portions maximum due to the sugar content.
- A portion is about 80g (roughly a handful) eg. a single apple, handful strawberries, small banana, 2 broccoli florets.
- Dried fruit, fresh fruit juice and smoothies are high in sugar and should be limited. Keep dried fruits to 1 tablespoon and fruit juices to no more than one glass (125ml) daily.
- Aim for half a plate of vegetables / salad at mealtimes.

## Protein

- Aim for at least 2 servings daily, a serving should take up around ¼ of your plate
- Choose lean sources such as chicken, turkey, fish, beans and pulses more often than red and processed meat. Vegetarian alternatives can also be a good option.
- Choose leaner cuts of meat and lower fat options eg. 5% fat minced beef instead of 15%, also trim away any visible fat and grill rather than fry

## Dairy and alternatives

- All dairy contains natural sugar (lactose) so it's advisable not to overconsume.
- Aim for 2-3 portions daily. A portion is around 200ml milk, a small matchbox serving of cheese (40g), a single pot of yogurt (125g)
- Choose lower fat options eg. semi skimmed rather than full fat milk and choose no added sugar yogurts

## Oils and spreads

- High in calories so should be limited to no more than 1 teaspoon, 2-3 x daily.
- Try grilling, oven baking, steaming or using a non-stick pan with a low calorie spray oil rather than using fat to cook with
- Choose unsaturated fats such as plant based oils and spreads rather than butter and lard

## Starchy Carbohydrates (Bread, rice, pasta, potatoes, cereal)

- Main energy source to be included at each mealtime but caution with portion size as they are broken down into glucose (sugar) so too much can cause high blood glucose levels.
- Aim for no more than a fist sized portion of cooked rice, pasta or potato at mealtimes which should occupy around 1/4 of your plate. A bread portion would be 2 slices.
- Try not to double up on portions ie. Don't have bread if already having chips.
- Choose wholegrain / wholemeal options and leave skins on potatoes for extra fibre.
- Higher fibre foods are broken down into glucose at a slower rate than low fibre options, so are better for blood glucose control.

## Foods high in fat and sugar (biscuits, cakes, sweets, ice cream etc. )

- Do not provide any essential nutrients but can be enjoyed in small amounts.
- Swap full sugar fizzy drinks for diet versions and no added sugar cordial.

## Should I use Diabetic / sugar free products?

Diabetic products such as diabetic chocolate and ice cream are not recommended as these can be expensive, high in fat and have a laxative effect. Using sugar free biscuits is also not necessary as these contain a similar amount of carbohydrate to regular biscuits, so will have a similar impact on your blood glucose levels. If you want to have these foods, use regular versions in small amounts.

## Can I still drink alcohol?

People with Diabetes can still drink alcohol within moderation; no more than 14 units per week, spread throughout with some alcohol free days. 1 unit ~ 1/2 pint lager, 25ml spirit, 75ml wine

Be mindful of the calories in your drinks, as these can add up quickly. A pint of lager has around 200 Calories, the equivalent of a doughnut!

Try diluting lager or white wine with diet lemonade or choosing a diet mixer with your spirits. You could also alternate your alcoholic drink with soft drinks.

If you take insulin or sulphonylurea's (eg. Gliclazide), alcohol can cause your blood glucose levels to drop too low (hypoglycaemia) - check your levels more closely and have a carbohydrate containing snack before bed when you drink alcohol.

## What about salt?

We should limit the amount of salt in our diet as too much can increase our blood pressure. Try using alternatives such as herbs, spices, lemon juice and pepper. There is no benefit of using pink salt / rock salt / himalayan salt as this is still salt, LoSalt is not recommended

## Should I try to lose some weight?

Being overweight can make it more difficult to control your blood glucose levels, it is therefore recommended to aim for gradual weight loss of no more than 1-2lb per week if you are overweight. Aiming for 5-10% weight loss can significantly improve your blood glucose levels.

If you are already a healthy weight, it is recommended that you maintain this and follow healthy eating principles.

If you are underweight or losing weight unintentionally then you may benefit from some weight gain. Eating little and often and increasing your intake of full fat milk, yogurts and cheese can help. Having puddings after mealtimes with added cream / custard may also be advisable. Please ask your GP to refer you to a Dietitian if you are having difficulty in maintaining a healthy weight



## Summary

- Aim to eat regular meals
- Have a portion of starchy carbohydrate at each mealtime and try not to double up
- Aim to increase vegetable / salad intake to at least 2-3 portions daily
- Limit fruit to no more than 3 portions daily, spread throughout the day
- Limit foods high in fat and choose lower fat versions where possible
- Cut down on sugary foods and drinks
- Diabetic foods are not recommended
- Reduce salt intake
- Drink alcohol in moderation

