

Overview

Knowing how to plan meals is a basic and critical part of managing all types of diabetes. While eating is a pleasurable part of life, food will raise blood glucose. The type and amount of foods that are eaten will affect how high and how fast blood glucose will go up. It is important to make good choices about when to eat, what to eat, and how much to eat.

When Should You Eat?

Eat Your Meals and Snacks at About the Same Time Each Day

When you eat your meals and snacks at the same time each day, your blood glucose level rises and falls in a way that becomes more regular. (These typical swings in blood glucose are your “blood glucose pattern”.) By understanding your blood glucose pattern, it is easier to adjust your diet, exercise, insulin and other diabetes medicine, to keep your blood glucose as close to normal levels as possible.

Balance Diabetes Medicine and Insulin with Food

If you have diabetes and take diabetes medicine or insulin, you must work a little harder to keep the right balance between the food and the medication or insulin. You should understand how long your medicine or insulin will work to lower blood glucose levels, and at what point it will be working the hardest. Then you can plan when to eat. Snacks between meals are especially important if you go more than five hours from meal to meal.

What Should You Eat?

Eat About the Same Size Meals and Snacks From Day to Day

Most Americans eat a small breakfast, a medium sized lunch, and a very large dinner. This forces the body to process most of the day’s food intake at the end of the day. A better idea is to eat a breakfast, lunch, and dinner that are about the same size. If you do this, you will be distributing your food intake more evenly throughout the day, keeping blood glucose levels more even. This will help your body more easily process the glucose coming from your food. You can help your body better process glucose and make your diet work for you by following basic nutrition rules.

Do Not Skip Meals

You and your doctor will adjust your diabetes medicine or insulin according to the typical changes in your blood glucose levels when you eat throughout the day. If you skip a meal, you may create a problem of too little food for the amount of medicine or insulin in your body. This can cause your blood glucose to fall too low (hypoglycemia). Also, skipping one meal makes it more likely that you will overeat at the next meal. Even if you do not take diabetes pills or insulin, you will still have more stable and controlled blood glucose levels if you eat in a balanced way.

How Much Should You Eat?

Controlling Portions

When you have diabetes, eating the proper portions of foods is just as important as taking the proper dosage of your diabetes medicine or insulin. If your portions are too large, your blood glucose level may go higher than your pills or insulin can control. You will also take in too many calories and gain weight. If your portions are too small, you may not have the proper balance between food, diabetes medicine or insulin and your blood glucose level may drop too low.

Examples of “eyeballing” portions:

- A 1-cup portion is about the size of a woman’s hand made into a fist.
- One teaspoon of butter is approximately a pat of butter.
- 1 oz. cheese is about the size of a 1” cube.
- 3 oz. meat is about the size of a deck of cards.

Important Things to Remember

- Everyone with diabetes should have a meal plan. Your doctor, dietitian, or diabetes educator can help you develop a meal plan that works for you.
- Schedule your meals and snacks into your day the way you would schedule important appointments. Try not to let anything interfere with your meal “appointments”.
- Practice weighing and measuring foods so you develop a trained eye for portion size.
- Food portions should be large enough to satisfy you, but not so large that they cause you to feel overly full.
- Meals should be approximately the same size and spread evenly throughout the day.
- Meals should include a variety of foods from all of the food groups.

How Can Your Doctor Help You?

Be sure to discuss dietary problems or questions with your doctor. If you are not certain that your diet is a healthy one, your doctor will be able to refer you to a dietitian. A dietitian will be able to provide you with answers and recommended meal plans. Your doctor can also help you to understand how the diabetes medicine or insulin you take might affect your blood glucose levels throughout the day. Finally, your doctor can inform you of any specific dietary requirements that you might have (such as low sodium to control high blood pressure).

Quiz

- 1) All of the following are basic nutrition rules for diabetes except for:
 - a) Eat different size meals and snacks from day to day
 - b) Balance medications and insulin with food
 - c) Do not skip meals
 - d) Eat meals and snacks at about the same time each day
 - e) Control portions
- 2) If you take insulin or diabetes medicine and skip a meal, your blood sugar may fall too _____.
- 3) True or False: When you have diabetes, eating the proper portions of foods is just as important as taking the proper dosage of medication or insulin.

Answers: 1) a, 2) low, 3) True