

Eat what you love with diabetes



By Michelle May, M.D. and Megrette Fletcher, MEd, RD, CDE. This article is based on their book *Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat with Diabetes: A Mindful Eating Program for Thriving with Prediabetes and Diabetes*.

Admittedly, nutrition information can be confusing. Are potatoes vegetables or starches? Are nuts fats or proteins? Are kidney beans carbs or protein? (All are both.)

If you sometimes feel overwhelmed by all of the decisions you must make, you're not alone! This article aims to offer a flexible, common sense approach to eating in a way that is enjoyable and sustainable.

So what is mindful eating, you may ask? A simple definition of mindful eating is eating with intention and attention - or with purpose and awareness. When you have diabetes, your intention might include keeping your blood glucose in target range and reducing your other risk factors. Staying attentive while you eat increases your enjoyment from eating and helps you identify the subtle symptoms of feeling full after a meal.

All foods fit

Intention and attention also help you choose from *all* foods - even when you have prediabetes or diabetes. Certainly some foods are more nutrient-rich than others, but depriving yourself of your favourite foods will backfire in the long run. You can eat what you love by using the common sense principles of balance, variety, and moderation. This all-foods-fit approach puts you in charge of making decisions that balance eating for enjoyment with eating for diabetes self-management.

Planning your plate

One of the reasons that nutrition

information can be so challenging is that you don't eat nutrients, you eat food. By visualising your meal and the food on your plate you can eat a healthier diet.

Carbohydrates count

When you have diabetes, it is necessary to be mindful of the total amount of carbohydrate you eat at each snack or meal because carbohydrates have the greatest effect on your glucose. However, not all carbohydrates make blood glucose rise at the same rate. On the *Eat What You Love with Diabetes Plate* (see diagram) you will find low-carbohydrate vegetables on the left, vegetables that have less than five grams of carbohydrates per half cup cooked, one cup raw, or two cups of salad greens. These vegetables also add important vitamins and minerals, in addition to two to three grams of fibre per serving, which increases how full you feel after eating.

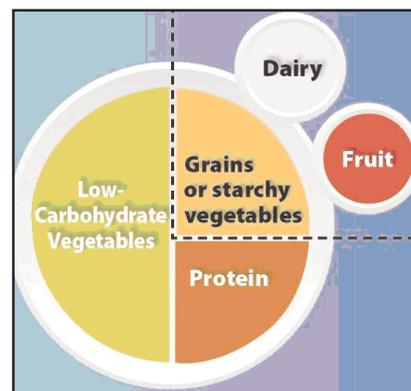
Visualising a plate containing starchy vegetables, grains, fruit, and dairy in the upper right hand corner will help you quickly determine which foods on your plate have a significant amount of carbohydrate, so that you can adjust your snack or meal for optimal blood sugar management. For example, if you had one slice of bread, a glass of milk, and a piece of fruit on your plate, that meal would provide you with 45 grams of carbohydrates.

Protein power

Protein has been shown to stimulate insulin production when eaten with carbohydrates in people with type 2 diabetes so eating protein with carbohydrates can decrease the rise in blood glucose. In addition, protein increases satiety (fullness and satisfaction), so you may eat less while feeling satisfied longer.

What about dessert?

There's a common misconception that people with diabetes aren't allowed to eat sugar. It's true that sugar is a carbohydrate, so it will raise your glucose level - all carbohydrates do - but that doesn't make sugar "bad" or make you bad for liking it! In fact, telling yourself you can't have it can lead to feelings of deprivation, cravings, and overeating, and that wrecks havoc with your blood glucose. If you really like them, fit sweets into your diet in moderation by including their carbohydrate content in your total for that snack or meal.



The authors created the *Eat What You Love with Diabetes Plate* as a guide to help plan meals

Putting it all together

Start by filling half your plate (see diagram) with low carbohydrate vegetables, like broccoli, green beans, asparagus, and/or salad. Moving counter-clockwise, make your protein selection, such as chicken, lean beef, fish, tofu, eggs, or cottage cheese. Next move to the carbohydrate section.

Once you know your carbohydrate goal, select the foods you would like to eat from your carbohydrate-containing options: starchy vegetables, grains, dairy, and fruit. Be sure to "save" some carbohydrates if you are planning to have dessert. Identify where the fat is in your meal, based on the foods and cooking methods you have selected, and decide whether you would like to add a healthy fat. For example, oil-based salad dressing, avocado, olives, and nuts, or seeds may increase how full you feel and help stabilise your blood sugar without increasing your cardiovascular risk.

While nutrition information can be complex, it is a tool, not a weapon. Use the simple principles of balance, variety, and moderation to help you manage your diabetes effectively *and* eat what you love.

More information

For more details about *Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat with Diabetes: A Mindful Eating Program for Thriving with Prediabetes and Diabetes* visit: <http://www.diabetesandmindfuleating.com/about-eat-what-you-love-love-what-you-eat-with-diabetes.html>.

The DRWF leaflet *A healthy diet and diabetes* can be ordered by calling 023 9263 6136 or downloaded online at <http://drwf.org.uk/Information.aspx>.