

Healthy Eating with Diabetes

What to Know About Healthy Eating with Diabetes

Healthy eating supports overall well-being and is an important part of diabetes management. Nourishing food choices may support blood glucose management, heart health, energy levels, and overall quality of life.

Benefits of healthy eating may include:

- **Blood Glucose Management:** Eating regular meals and nourishing snacks may help support steadier blood glucose levels and improve insulin sensitivity.
- **Heart and Kidney Health:** Living with diabetes can increase the risk of heart and kidney disease. Healthier eating patterns, especially those that are more plant-based, can support heart and kidney health. This means including more fiber-rich foods like whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and legumes, along with lean proteins and healthy fats.
- **Weight Management:** Nutritious food choices can help provide the energy and nutrients your body needs while supporting weight management.
- **Supporting Long-Term Health:** Healthy eating can play an important role in overall health and may help support the management of diabetes-related health concerns and complications over time.

Simple Ways to Build a Healthy Plate

- **Follow the Diabetes Plate Method:**
 - Fill half your plate with non-starchy vegetables such as broccoli, carrots, leafy greens, peppers, or cucumbers.
 - Use one-quarter of your plate for protein, such as fish, chicken, eggs, tofu, beans, or lentils.
 - Use the remaining quarter for carbohydrate foods like whole grains, starchy vegetables, or fruit.
 - Include water or a zero-calorie beverage with your meal.



Photo Credit: [CDC Diabetes Meal Planning](https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/mealplanning/)

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- **Make Nourishing Food Choices:**

- Non-starchy vegetables can help you feel full while providing fiber, vitamins, and minerals.
- Choose lean, less processed proteins, especially those that are plant based. This includes beans, lentils, tofu, nuts, seeds, lean meats, fish, and eggs.
- Fruit provides important vitamins, minerals, and fiber, and can be included in balanced meals and snacks.
- Healthy fats, such as olive oil, nuts, seeds, and avocados, may help support heart health when enjoyed in appropriate amounts.
- Choose fiber-rich carbohydrates like whole grains, beans, fruits, and vegetables more often. Try to limit more highly processed foods like chips, sugary snacks, white bread, and white rice.

- **Portion Awareness:**

- Paying attention to portion sizes can help support balanced nutrition and help you better recognize hunger and fullness cues.

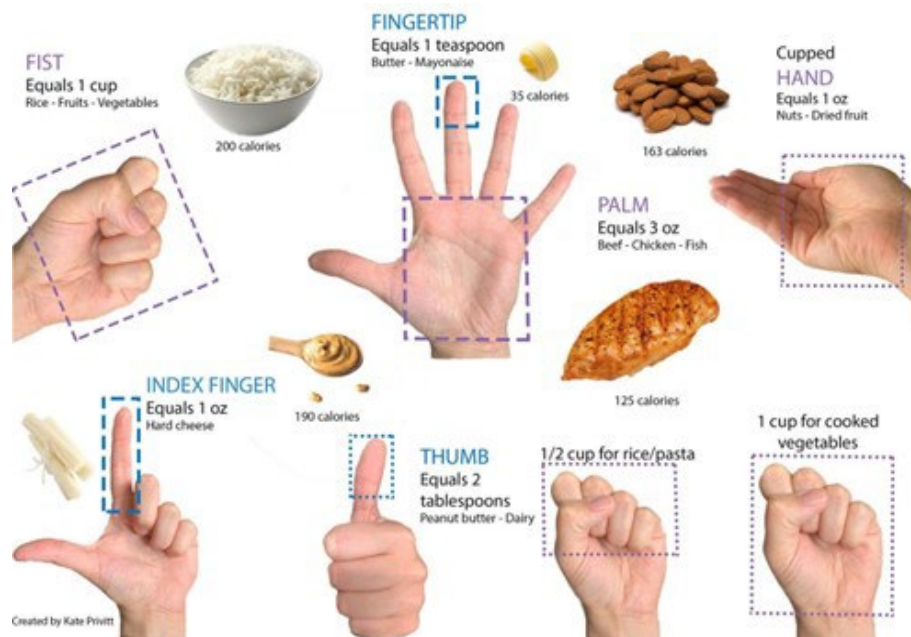


Photo Credit: [Portion Size Guide](#)

- **Personalized Support:**

- A registered dietitian can help you create a meal plan that fits your health needs, preferences, culture, schedule, and budget. Ask your healthcare provider for a referral or use the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics [Find a Nutrition Expert](#).

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Increasing Plant-Based Eating To Support Health

Plant-based eating focuses on including more foods from plants, such as vegetables, fruits, beans, lentils, whole grains, nuts, and seeds. A plant-based approach may [support heart health, blood glucose management, and overall well-being](#). Small changes, such as adding more vegetables to meals or incorporating beans or lentils more often, can make a difference.

Simple ways to fit more plant-based foods into your eating plan include:

- **Adding beans or lentils** to soups, salads, tacos, or pasta dishes.
- **Choosing whole grains** like brown rice, quinoa, or oats more often.
- **Trying plant-based proteins** such as tofu, tempeh, edamame, lentils, or seitan.
- **Building meals** around vegetables, fruits, and fiber-rich foods.
- **Experimenting** with one plant-based meal or snack each week.

Navigating Healthy Eating Challenges in Real Life

- **Time Constraints**
 - **Why this can be challenging:** Busy schedules often lead to rushed food choices or reliance on convenience foods. Preparing healthy meals and snacks requires time and planning.
 - **What may help:** Schedule time for meal planning, grocery shopping, and meal prep. Keep quick meal and snack ideas on hand, use frozen or pre-cut produce, or prepare extra portions for leftovers. Appliances like slow cookers or air fryers can also save time and offer healthier ways to prepare food.
- **Cravings and Feeling Deprived**
 - **Why this can be challenging:** Cravings for comfort foods high in sugar, salt, or fat are normal, especially during stressful or busy periods.
 - **What may help:** Try making healthier versions of your favorite dishes. Focus on balance instead of restriction. Healthy eating does not mean giving up favorite foods. All foods can fit in moderation.
- **Portion Control and Mindless Eating**
 - **Why this can be challenging:** Eating while distracted or losing track of portions can make it harder to notice hunger and fullness cues. Even nutritious foods can be harder to balance when portions become too large.

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- **What may help:** Use the Diabetes Plate Method, smaller dishes, or visual portion guides to help build balanced meals.
- **Social Situations**
 - **Why this can be challenging:** Restaurants, holidays, and gatherings can make healthy choices more challenging.
 - **What may help:** Plan ahead when possible and focus on progress, not perfection. One meal or event does not define your overall habits.
- **Emotional Eating**
 - **Why this can be challenging:** Stress, boredom, sadness, or frustration can sometimes lead to eating for comfort.
 - **What may help:** Pause and ask what you need in that moment. [Small coping strategies](#) like walking, journaling, calling a friend, or drinking water may help.
- **Lack of Variety**
 - **Why this can be challenging:** Eating the same foods repeatedly can become boring or discouraging.
 - **What may help:** Experiment with different herbs, spices, vegetables, textures, or healthier versions of favorite meals to keep eating enjoyable.
- **High Food Costs**
 - **Why this can be challenging:** Eating well on a budget can be difficult, and the cost of nutritious foods can feel out of reach.
 - **What may help:** Pantry staples like beans, lentils, and grains are often budget-friendly, especially when bought in bulk. Cooking at home, choosing seasonal produce, and looking for sales or coupons can all help stretch food dollars.
- **Limited Access to Healthy Foods**
 - **Why this can be challenging:** In some communities, it can be difficult to find fresh fruits, vegetables, and other nutritious foods.
 - **What may help:** Frozen or canned fruits and vegetables can still be nutritious and more widely available.
- **Feeling Overwhelmed by Healthy Eating**
 - **Why this can be challenging:** Trying to change everything at once can feel discouraging.
 - **What may help:** Start with one small, realistic step. Healthy eating is a journey, and gradual progress matters more than perfection.

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Honoring Cultural Foods While Supporting Your Health

Cultural foods are an important part of identity, family, tradition, and connection. Traditional meals can absolutely fit into a balanced and nourishing way of eating. Small adjustments may help support your health while still honoring the flavors and foods that matter to you.

- **Focus on Ingredients, Not Just the Finished Dish:** Many traditional meals include nourishing ingredients like vegetables, beans, grains, and proteins. Paying attention to ingredients and preparation methods can help support balance while preserving flavor and tradition.
- **Build on Traditional Foods:** Small changes can help increase fiber and variety while keeping familiar flavors and traditions.
 - Southern dishes like gumbo or casseroles can include lean proteins, whole grains, and extra vegetables.
 - Indian biryani can be prepared with whole-grain basmati rice and added vegetables.
 - Mexican arroz con pollo can include brown rice, skinless chicken, and colorful vegetables.
- **Choose Fats Thoughtfully:** Oils such as olive oil or avocado oil contain unsaturated fats that may help support heart health.
- **Balance Meals Over Time:** Some meals may be richer or more celebratory than others. Looking at your eating patterns over several days or a week can help create flexibility and balance.
- **Make Small Changes Gradually:** Small adjustments are often easier to maintain over time.
 - Try whole grains like brown rice, quinoa, or whole wheat more often.
 - Reduce added sugar gradually or experiment with using less than a recipe calls for.
 - Add more vegetables, fruit, beans, or lentils to meals for additional fiber, color, and variety.

Making Healthy Eating a Priority

Healthy eating looks different for everyone, and it often starts with identifying what's getting in your way. What is one small, realistic step you can take over the next few weeks to help you navigate that challenge?