

# Diabetes Meal Plan Basics

A big concern for people diagnosed with diabetes is **“What can I eat?”** It is often hard to know where to begin. Use these simple tips to help you create healthy habits and form a meal plan that will work for you.



## 1. Eat the Right Amount of Calories

Calorie needs depends on many factors. **Eat more** than you need and you **gain weight**; **eat less (or burn more)** than you need and you **lose weight**. Track your calories for a few days. Look at food labels and restaurant signs to help you calculate.

## 2. Choose Your Calories Wisely

How do you “spend” your calories? One way to think about your caloric intake is to imagine it like a budget. Try to make smart choices how you “spend” your calories on food. The important thing is to spend your calories on food choices that will improve your well-being, not on items that will harm your long-term health. In other words, choose wisely.



## 3. Follow a Balanced Diet

Invest in your health by choosing:

More	Less
Whole grains	Refined sugars and flour
Vegetables	Starchy Vegetables
Fruit	Sweetened drinks
Low or Non-fat milk and yogurt	High-fat ice cream and cheese
Lean meats, chicken and fish	Butter, stick margarine, shortening and lard
Beans and legumes	Salty foods
Coconut, canola and olive oil	Fried foods
	Fatty meats
	Fast food
	Alcohol
	Sweets

## 4. When to Eat

You may find it easier to control your blood sugar levels if you eat on a regular schedule. To keep glucose and weight under control, it’s best to not skip meals. Try to eat every 4-5 hours. For breakfast, try to eat within 1-2 hours after getting up.



## 5. Know Where to Find Carbs

Carbohydrates, one of the three nutrients that provide calories from food, have the greatest impact on your blood glucose, especially after you eat. Carbs can be found in most foods, including: **grains (like bread, pasta, and rice)**, **starchy vegetables (potatoes, carrots, and corn)**, **beans and legumes**, **fruit**, **dairy products**, **sweets**, and **sugary foods**.



## 6. Eat the Right Amount of Carbs

**"How many grams of carbohydrate should I eat a day?"** The amount of carbohydrate you need depends on many factors. However, the American Diabetes Association (ADA) offers an estimate you can use as a starting point.

To **lose** weight:

- Women: **2-3** carb servings **per meal** (30-45 grams of carbohydrates)
- Men: **3-4** carb servings **per meal** (45-60 grams of carbohydrates)

To **maintain** weight:

- Women: **3-4** carb servings **per meal** (45-60 grams of carbohydrates)
- Men: **4-5** carb servings **per meal** (60-75 grams of carbohydrates)

For **active** people:

- Women: **4-5** carb servings **per meal** (60-75 grams of carbohydrates)
- Men: **4-6** carb servings **per meal** (60-90 grams of carbohydrates)

Note that **ONE carb serving is equal to 15g of carbohydrates**. So, if you eat a bag of potato chips with 30g of carbohydrates, that is equal to **two** carb servings.



## 7. Portion Control

Some people use a food scale, measuring cups and spoons, and even their hands to gauge portion sizes. One method that helps with “eyeballing” portions, as well as meal planning is the plate method. It's relatively easy to use; all you need is a plate that's 9 inches across. Then follow these simple guidelines.

- Non-starchy vegetables take up 1/2 of the plate
- Lean protein takes up 1/4 of the plate
- Grains or starchy vegetables take up 1/4 of the plate

## 8. The Emotional Side of Eating

It can be a challenge to eat healthfully at every meal, every day. Try your best to make healthy choices where and when you can. Take heart in knowing that no one is perfect—everyone has an off day now and again. It's important to keep trying and not be too hard on yourself. Having a positive attitude can help keep you motivated and feeling well.

One thing that can be extra helpful in keeping you on track is to make your own meals. Try not to dine out more than three times a week. Making your own meals increases your awareness of the foods you eat, is more practical to control portion sizes, and is easier to cook with healthful ingredients. Plus, it costs less!



## Eat What You Love!

**Food** (sugar, carbs, fiber, protein) **is not your enemy**. With the help of a wide variety of tasty, carb-friendly recipes and quick tips to help you eat more healthfully, you can take control of your diabetes with every bite.