

# Type 2 diabetes and food

Food which is healthy for people with diabetes is healthy for others as well. The most important thing to remember is the size of the meals and variation of the food you eat. Healthy eating habits can help you maintain your blood sugar at the right level.

## What is in food which affects the blood sugar level?

Food provides us with nutrients, such as protein, fat and carbohydrates that the body needs. It is the carbohydrates that raise your blood sugar level. We can divide carbohydrates into fast and slow types. It takes the body longer to break down slow carbohydrates into sugar (glucose). Therefore, these carbohydrates do not affect your blood sugar level as much as fast carbohydrates. Examples of foods that contain slow carbohydrates are lentils, beans and wholegrain pasta. The body breaks down fast carbohydrates into sugar (glucose) and these cause your blood sugar level to rise more rapidly. Examples of foods that contain fast carbohydrates are white bread, cornflakes and glutinous rice.

To improve your blood sugar level, it is a good idea to reduce your intake of carbohydrates and to eat more slow carbohydrates rather than fast carbohydrates.

Testing your own blood sugar level can help you to see how the amount and type of carbohydrates you consume affect your blood sugar level. Measure your blood sugar immediately before and two hours after meals. A suitable blood sugar level is in the range 4-6 mmol/l before a meal and no more than 8-10 mmol/l two hours after a meal.

Discuss with your doctor or diabetes nurse what an appropriate weight for you and your diabetes is.

You can monitor your weight by weighing yourself regularly (e.g. once a week or once a month).

## Advice for a better blood sugar level

Spread your meals over the whole day. Breakfast, lunch and dinner, as well as 1-3 snacks is a good spread.

When eating, follow the "little and often rule"—this can help you determine the right amounts of different foods and portion sizes. Eating plenty of vegetables will help your blood sugar level stabilize and make it easier to maintain a good weight.

Eat wholegrain products and high-fiber foods such as lentils, beans and wholegrain rice, pasta, bread and bulgur wheat. A useful aid which makes it easier to choose healthy foods is the keyhole symbol. The keyhole is a symbol used on food products in Sweden, such as bread, muesli, cereals, lean cuts of meat, dairy products, meat products, vegetarian food and ready meals. If the food you buy has the keyhole symbol printed on it, it will contain more fiber and wholegrain, less sugar, less or healthier fats, and less salt.

Drinks can often be a source of fast carbohydrates. Water, mineral water, broth, coffee and tea without sugar and milk are examples of drinks which do not contain carbohydrates and therefore do not affect your blood sugar level.

Drinks such as fruit juice, squash, fruktsoppor,

soft drinks and cider can contain large amounts of carbohydrates that affect blood sugar level. Soda pops and soft drinks are often available in sugarfree versions, which do not affect blood sugar levels as much.

**“Treats”** Confectionery, chocolate, ice cream, crisps, dried fruit, dates, buns, cakes and biscuits are considered to be “treats”. This means that these foods should be limited to a couple of times a week and only in small quantities each time. Make a distinction between weekdays and parties. Nuts and olives can be good alternatives to treats. Try not to eat more than 0.5 dl of nuts a maximum of five times a week.

### **Eat fats that are healthier for the blood and reduce the risk to your heart and cardiovascular system**

It is not just carbohydrates that you need to consider if you have diabetes. Also eating fats that are healthier for the blood can reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease. You can do this by eating the right amount of fat—of the right type.

Healthy fats are unsaturated and monounsaturated fats which occur in oil, fish, nuts, seeds and avocado. Cut down on saturated fats, which you find in butter, cheese, crème fraîche and chocolate.

### **Food containing carbohydrates**

**Vegetables & root vegetables.** Eat all types of at least 250 g of vegetables and root vegetables, both raw and cooked, per day and preferably more.

**Fruit & berries.** The right amount is about 1–3 portion of fruit per day. Eat only one piece of fruit on each occasion. One piece of fruit is equivalent to 2 dl of berries. Avoid dried fruit.

**Bean, lentils & peas.** These are particularly valuable

sources of slow carbohydrates and are high in fiber. They also contain healthy proteins and lots of nutrients.

**Rice & pasta.** You should ideally choose wholegrain products. Other healthy alternatives include bulgur wheat, barley, wheat berry and quinoa.

**Potatoes.** Boiled potatoes are a good way of satisfying your appetite. Mashed potatoes will rapidly raise your blood sugar level. French fries often contain too much fat.

**Bread & flour.** Choose wholegrain bread containing at least 5 g dietary fiber per 100 g. Look out for the keyhole symbol on bread.

### **Food containing fat and protein**

**Meat, poultry, fish, egg, cheese & cottage cheese.** Cut down on the amount of beef and pork you eat. Eat fish and sea food of all kinds, 2–3 times a week. Healthy sandwich filling or toppings include mackerel in tomato sauce, tuna, cottage cheese, egg and lean cuts of meat. Choose keyhole-marked products, such as sausages, liver pâté and cheese.

**Unsaturated fat.** Use liquid fats and oils for cooking and keyhole-marked fats for sandwiches.

**Nuts and peanuts.** Contain healthy fats. A guideline amount is 0.5 dl five times a week.

**Milk, buttermilk-flavored yogurt & yogurt.** The right amount is about 5–6 dl per day but do not drink more than one glass (2 dl) on each occasion. Choose natural keyhole-marked types, as flavored varieties usually contain large amounts of added sugar.

### **Other**

**Sweeteners.** If you want to sweeten coffee, tea,

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porridge, buttermilk-flavored yogurt or yogurt, use energy-free artificial sweeteners, such as Hermestas, Canderel, Stevia sweet, Suketter. These contain compounds which do not raise your blood sugar level, e.g. Aspartame, Acesulfame potassium, Saccharine, Cyclamate, Sucralose and Steviol glycosides.

**Alcohol.** Alcohol lowers the blood sugar after a few hours. Everything from wine to liqueurs contains varying amounts of sugar. Your medication can affect the way in which the alcohol affects blood sugar levels. The diabetes nurse or doctor will be able to advise you on this.

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INFORMATION TAKEN FROM BRA MAT DIABETES PRODUCED BY THE DIETITIANS IN REGION SKÅNE. REVIEWED BY HANNAH HELGEGREN, REGISTERED DIETITIAN.