



Diabetes Basics

This handout provides basic information about diabetes.

Frequent visits with your health care provider will help you manage your diabetes well. Your dietitian will teach you more about carbohydrates and how diet affects diabetes. Work with your dietitian to create a diet that suits your needs and lifestyle.

This handout contains guidelines only. It is best to talk about your specific dietary needs with a dietitian or diet technician.

Managing your diabetes includes eating a balanced diet, exercising, monitoring your blood glucose levels, and possibly taking insulin or other medicines. All of these will help you live a healthy life with diabetes.

Prediabetes

Prediabetes means your blood sugar levels are above normal, but they are not high enough to diagnose as diabetes. Many people with prediabetes develop type 2 diabetes (see below). You can lower your risk of developing type 2 diabetes by losing weight and exercising 30 minutes a day.

Type 1 and Type 2 Diabetes

Everyone needs insulin to help their body cells absorb glucose from their blood.

- In **type 1 diabetes**, the body no longer makes insulin, so people with type 1 must take shots or use an insulin pump to deliver insulin into their bodies.
- In **type 2 diabetes**, the body does not make enough insulin, or the insulin is not being fully used. People with type 2 need oral medicines, and sometimes insulin injections, to manage their blood glucose when dietary changes and exercise are not enough.

Carbohydrates and Blood Glucose

Your dietary guidelines will depend on whether you have type 1 or type 2 diabetes. But, no matter what kind of diabetes you have, it is important for you to know how many carbohydrates you are eating. Carbohydrates are absorbed and broken down into blood glucose. The more carbohydrates you eat, the more your blood glucose level rises. Your meal plan will be based on your exercise, dietary needs, and personal lifestyle habits.

Counting Carbohydrates

As part of managing your diabetes, you will learn how to choose foods based on how many carbohydrate “choices” you may have at a meal. One carbohydrate choice contains 15 grams of carbohydrate. (See the left side of page 2 for some examples of 1 carbohydrate choice.)

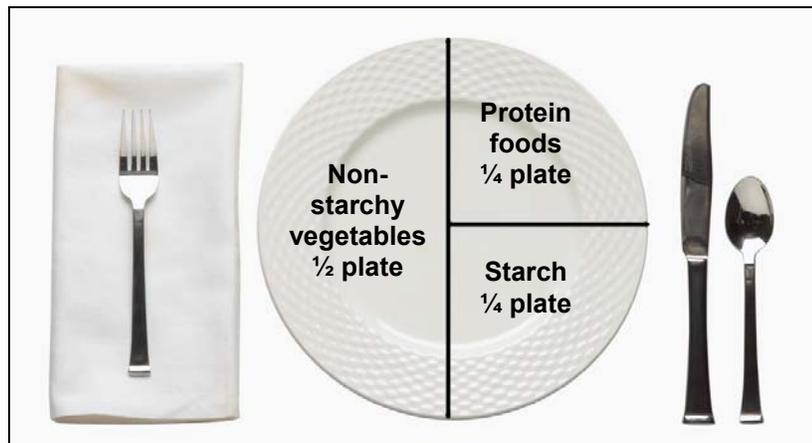
Examples of Carbohydrate Choices

- 1 cup milk or yogurt
- ½ cup cooked hot cereal
- ½ cup ice cream
- 1 small whole fruit (4 ounces)
- ½ cup cooked legumes
- 3 cups popped popcorn
- 10 rice crackers
- 1 slice bread
- 1 tablespoon jam or syrup
- ⅓ cup cooked pasta, rice, or noodles
- ½ cup yams
- ½ cup fresh fruit or juice

The main foods that contain carbohydrate are grain products, fruit, dairy products, and sweets. If you are unsure of the amount of carbohydrate in a prepared food, check the “Nutrition Facts” label for the “Total Carbohydrate.”

“Balancing your plate” at lunch and dinner will help you get the right amount of food from each food group:

- Non-starchy vegetables such as broccoli, cauliflower, green beans, greens, or summer squash should take up ½ of your plate
- Starch such as bread, corn, grains, pasta, or potatoes should take up ¼ of your plate
- Protein such as meat, fish, beans, or tofu should take up ¼ of your plate



“Balance your plate” to get the right amounts of each food group

Exercise

Exercise helps the body use glucose from the blood. This keeps blood glucose levels from rising without the help of insulin. People with diabetes can benefit greatly from regular exercise.

A regular exercise program can mean fewer or smaller insulin injections for people with type 1 diabetes, and less use of medicines and insulin injections for people with type 2. In both types, exercise helps with weight loss. For those with type 2, exercise and weight loss may reduce the symptoms of diabetes.

Weight Loss

A 5% to 10% reduction in body weight along with 30 minutes of exercise each day can help you lower your blood glucose levels. See our handout “Do You Need to Lose Weight?” to learn more.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Your Dietitian or Diet Technician:

Blood Glucose Monitoring

Monitoring your blood glucose with a blood glucose meter will help you manage your diabetes. Not letting your blood glucose get too high or too low will help prevent complications of diabetes.

Hypoglycemia and Hyperglycemia

Blood glucose that is too low is called *hypoglycemia*. It can cause dizziness, tiredness, confusion, and possibly coma. Blood glucose that is too high is called *hyperglycemia*. Possible long-term complications of hyperglycemia are kidney disease, loss of sight, and loss of feeling in the feet and hands.

These complications may be totally avoided or delayed by keeping your blood glucose levels in the range your provider recommends for you.

Using a Glucose Meter

You will use a small meter to check your blood glucose. Your diabetes educator will teach you how to use it. The basic steps are:

- Wash and dry your hands.
- Insert a blood-test strip into the meter to turn it on.
- Prick your finger to get a small drop of blood to test.
- Place the drop of blood on the testing strip.
- Wait for the meter to count down (usually 5 to 15 seconds).
- Read the meter display to see your blood glucose level.

It is important to know what your blood glucose levels are so that your diet and medicines can be adjusted as needed.

Your meter will come with specific instructions. Ask your diabetes educator if you need help learning how to use your meter or if you have problems getting enough blood to do a test.

Notes
