

Tips for making healthy food choices

A diabetic diet is all about balance and good choices. It works best when you eat a variety of foods in the right portions the same times each day. You do not have to give up your favorite foods.

Your food choices should come from three groups:

- Carbohydrates (Carbs): 45 to 65 percent of daily calories
- Proteins: 15 to 20 percent of daily calories
- Fats: 20 to 35 percent of daily calories

Eating the right foods can help keep your blood sugar in the normal range. That can give you energy to do the everyday things you enjoy. So, how can you make sure to get enough of each food type every day?

Imagine your plate divided into quarters. Use it to control your portions.

- Fill 1/4 of your plate with carbs (rice, whole grains, potatoes, pasta, corn and peas)
- Fill 1/4 of your plate with lean protein (meat, fish, poultry and tofu)
- Fill 1/2 of your plate with non-starchy veggies (green leafy vegetables, broccoli, tomatoes, cauliflower, cucumbers, carrots and salads)

Now you have an idea about how to fill your plate. Let's look at some options in each group.

Carbs such as fruits, whole grains and vegetables are vital parts of your diet. Many carbs contain fiber that gives energy and a sense of feeling full. There are three main types of carbs: starches, sugar and fiber. Finding a good balance of all three is vital. If you're not careful, these foods are most likely to drive up your blood sugar.

More than half of your daily diet should be filled with vegetables, whole grains and fruits.

It is best to eat sweets and snacks rarely. You can reduce eating other carbs on days you want to splurge. Some good choices you can make to help meet your nutritional needs include:

- Breads - whole grains are best
- Vegetables - from a rainbow of different colors
- Fruits
- Brown rice or whole wheat pasta
- Beans and legumes
- Raw nuts and seeds
- Low-fat dairy products

SMALL EASY STEP

- Substitute white flour breads and pasta with those made of whole wheat and whole grains
- Substitute a cup of orange juice with a piece of fresh fruit which includes good fiber

Proteins are your fish, poultry and meat items. Milk products also contain protein, as do most beans, nuts and seeds. They are needed for energy and to keep your body in good shape. Here is a list of some high protein foods:

- Beef - choose lean cuts
- Chicken - go skinless to reduce fat
- Pork
- Fish - bake, grill or broil instead of frying
- Beans
- Cheese
- Eggs
- Milk
- Nuts

SMALL EASY STEP

- Choose a 6-inch roast beef or oven-roasted chicken sub in place of a 6-inch tuna sub loaded with fatty mayonnaise
- Gradually move from whole milk products to 2%, then 1%, and finally fat-free milk and yogurts

Fats should make up the smallest portion of your daily diet. Fats are found in many processed foods. Make sure you read food labels. Some fats are better than others. In fact, we need fats in our diet to keep our body working well.

Unhealthy fats are trans and saturated. Healthy fats are monosaturated and polyunsaturated. Healthy fats are found in:

- Olive oil
- Vegetable oils
- Nuts and seeds
- Fatty, cold-water fish (salmon, mackerel and herring)

These items also contain essential fatty acids. Omega-3 and Omega-6 can help lower cholesterol. Even a very small amount of fat has a large amount of calories. Foods that include unhealthy fats are: butter, ice cream, coconut oil, cheese, cakes, cookies, crackers, chips, candy and some margarines.

SMALL EASY STEPS

- Read labels and substitute healthy fats in place of unhealthy fats
- Try cooking with olive oil or canola oil in place of butter or margarine
- Eat peanut butter on apple pieces or celery stalks to get protein, carbs and fiber with your fat

Some people with diabetes use *exchanges*. These are simple ways to plan your meals. A full day of meals might include 3 exchanges of each: whole grains, protein, dairy, vegetables and fruits.

A dietitian can help you with diet planning and questions about certain foods and portion sizes. If you have trouble finding a dietitian, call toll-free 1-888-830-4300 to speak with an Amerigroup Texas diabetes case manager. People who are deaf or hard of hearing should dial 711. A diabetes case manager can help you connect with a dietitian who can work with you. Here are some ideas to get you started making diet changes:

- Eat the same amount around the same times each day
- Use variety and spice things up with herbs, seasonings, lemon juice and low-sodium soy sauce
- Be creative
- Keep telling yourself you can do it
- Use all the resources you can
- Reward yourself

Sources:

* American Diabetes Association

www.diabetes.org

* Diabetes Health www.diabeteshealth.com/

* American Heart Association Diabetes Subpage

http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/Diabetes/Diabetes_UCM_001091_SubHomePage.jsp, accessed November 8, 2013.