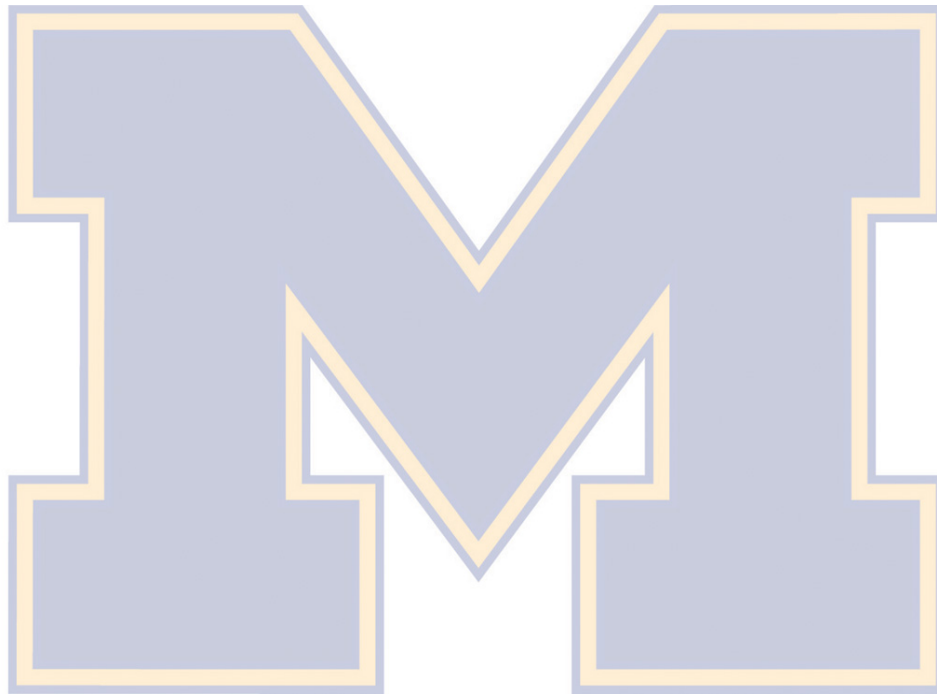


# Newsletter #28

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## **Planning Meals: When, What and How Much**

One of the hardest things about living with diabetes is figuring out what to eat. It may help to break it down into when, what and how much.

### **When to eat:**

Eat several smaller meals throughout the day at about the same time of day. This helps your pancreas to keep up with the demand for insulin and helps keep your blood sugar more even. Eat at least a little bit of breakfast so you feel less hungry later in the day and it will be easier not to overeat. Skipping meals can cause your blood sugar to go low. Most people say they feel better when their blood sugar is not going up and down all day. Your blood sugar will stay more even if you eat at about the same times every day.

### **What to eat:**

The good news is that there is nothing you cannot eat and there is nothing you “have to” or “should” eat or that is especially “good” for people with diabetes. The food that is healthy for people with diabetes is the same food that is healthy for everyone.

Food is made up of carbohydrates, proteins and fat. A healthful diet includes all of these. Carbohydrates affect your blood sugar levels the most. This does not mean that you need to eat a low-carbohydrate diet, but you do need to balance the carbohydrates with your diabetes medicines and activity. Although many people think that sugar is off-limits when you have diabetes, sugar has the same effect on your blood sugar as other carbohydrates.

Proteins and fats do not directly affect your blood sugar levels. They do, however have calories and can affect your cholesterol levels.

Although many people think that there is a “diabetes diet”, your meal plan will work best if it is based on how your diabetes is treated.

- If you manage your diabetes with just diet and exercise or take diabetes pills: Make healthy choices and pay attention to portion sizes. Try to eat similar amounts of carbohydrates at about the same times each day.
- If you take insulin once or twice a day before breakfast or bedtime: Eat similar amounts of carbohydrates at about the same time each day. Being consistent and not skipping meals helps to prevent low blood sugar levels (less than 70 mg/dL).
- If you take insulin before each meal: You can learn to count the carbohydrates and adjust your doses to match.

### **How much to eat:**

As a general rule, women need 3-4 carbohydrate choices (45-60 grams) per meal and men need 4-5 (60-75 grams). One carbohydrate choice equals 15 grams of carbohydrate. For example, a slice of bread has 15 grams of total carbohydrate and counts as 1 carbohydrate choice.

One way to manage your carbohydrates is to use your plate as a guide. Fill half of your plate with cooked or raw crunchy vegetables or salad,  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the plate with a starch and  $\frac{1}{4}$  with meat. Add a small piece of fruit and milk, and you now have a meal with 3 carbohydrate choices. Choosing larger portions or adding starches or fruit gives you additional carbohydrate

choices. Food labels also include the amount of total carbohydrate per serving.

It is important to note that the plate does not tell you the amount to eat, but how to *count* what you eat. So for example, if at lunch you have a sandwich with 2 slices of bread, a lettuce salad and a small piece of fruit, you will have eaten 3 carbohydrate choices. If you decide to have a cookie that has 15 grams of carbohydrate but want to stick with 3 carbohydrate choices, you can choose to use only 1 slice of bread on the sandwich or leave off the piece of fruit.

### **But is it working?**

The best way to figure out if your food is balanced with your medicines and activity is to check your blood sugar before and about 2 hours after you eat. Within 2 hours, your blood sugar should be close to what it was before your meal or back into your target range (less than 180 mg/dL). If your blood sugar is too high or too low 2 hours after your meal most days of the week, talk to your health care team about how to adjust your medicines, activity or carbohydrate intake.

### **Ask your dietitian, nurse or doctor the following questions:**

1. Are there changes I can make in my meal plan to keep my blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol on target?
2. How can I make changes in my medicines or activity to better balance with the carbohydrates I eat?

3. Do you have any advice for how I can deal with being hungry all of the time or eating when I feel stressed?
4. Ask your doctor to refer you to a dietitian or diabetes education program for additional help.