

Living with type 2 diabetes is not an easy feat. Add to that the hype around 'Clean Eating' which can easily overwhelm any diabetic with all the restrictions it poses. It is true that living well with diabetes type 2 starts with the right diet plan. However, it does not have to be an everyday challenge to figure out what to eat to keep your blood sugar levels balanced. Let us look at what should be a good diet plan for diabetics.

The Basics of a Good Diabetes Diet Plan

A Mix of Nutritious & Natural Foods

Let me simplify this. A good type 2 diabetes diet plan ensures that you get:

Adequate amount of fiber-rich whole grains

Fresh fruits and vegetables

Organic lean cuts of organic meats, and

A good amount of healthy fats from sources like fatty fish, avocados, coconut oil and grass-fed butter

The basics of a diabetes diet plan are simple. Smoke out all hidden sugars from your diet, cut back on carbohydrates, add more fiber to your diet and choose the fats you eat wisely.

Minimum Carbohydrates

It is imperative that you understand it is not just sugars that are responsible for elevated blood sugar. All carbohydrates get broken down into sugars. For this reason, choosing the right source of carb is an essential part of your diabetes diet plan. Vegetables and fruits are the right sources of carbs for any diabetic. Refined carbohydrates with a high glycemic index are best avoided, as the body readily transforms them into simple sugars. When choosing grains, complex carbohydrates are better choices. Brown rice, quinoa, barley, steel-cut oats, whole-wheat breads, buckwheat, and millets are some examples of complex carbohydrates.

Learn to Use Good Fats

At this point, we would like to add that changing your diet to reverse diabetes is a lifelong commitment, and it is not as difficult as it may sound. We get it — we all have been eating way too many carbs for decades. And so, we cannot imagine a life that asks us to cut back on these. But it can be done. It takes a little getting used to. But if you make sure that your diabetes diet has the good fats your body needs, it will respond by learning to use fats, instead of craving sugar.

3 Easy Options to Move to A Diabetes Diet Plan:

Now that we have run through the basics of a good diabetes diet plan, let us discuss how you can start eating the right way. Once you understand the basic rules, there are 3 ways you can make the transition to a healthier eating style. Do consult a dietician to discuss your specific health conditions and arrive at the best eating strategy for you.

Option 1: Design Your Plate

This is a simple strategy that will ensure you fill up your plate with the right kind of carbohydrates. Recommended by the American Diabetes Association, it revolves around designing your plate by:

Fill up one-half of your plate with any non-starchy vegetables of your choice. Examples are lettuce, broccoli, zucchini, spinach, carrots, beans, asparagus, and tomatoes.

Next, fill one-quarter of your plate with a lean protein of your choice. Examples are poached salmon, tuna, grilled chicken or turkey breast and lean pork chops.

Fill the last quarter of your plate with fiber-rich whole grains. We recommend brown rice, quinoa, barley, steel-cut oats and millets. You could swap grains for starchy vegetables if you would like to try a grain-free meal. Choose from sweet potatoes, corn, peas, winter squash and dried beans.

Option 2: Carbohydrate Counting

We do not support the idea of calorie counting for all circumstances as not all calories are designed equal. You cannot equate 200 calories coming from a grilled chicken breast to those coming from a bag of chips.

But for those who are new to eating a low-carb diet, the idea of counting carbohydrates does make sense. Why? Because all carbs break down into glucose, so they have the greatest impact on your blood glucose level.

So, it makes sense to keep a close eye on your carbohydrate intake to keep your blood sugar at healthy levels.

The American Diabetes Association recommends 135–230 grams of carbs per day for diabetics.

A study following a small group of obese patients with type 2 diabetes found that a low-carbohydrate diet (only 21grams/day) followed for 2 weeks resulted in much improved 24-hour blood glucose profiles, insulin sensitivity, and hemoglobin A1c. It also led to decreased plasma triglyceride and cholesterol levels. So low-carb diets do make A LOT of sense.

While carbohydrate counting may sound tricky in the beginning, soon you will get a hang of it. When starting this method, you will need to invest in kitchen weighing scales to get the portions right. Once you do this for a few weeks to months, you will intuitively be able to eat the right amounts of carbohydrates (from good, fiber-rich sources!) without having to measure out portions for every meal.

Option 3: Following Glycemic Index

Following the Glycemic Index (GI) is another method to stabilize blood sugar levels through the right diabetes diet. What this method does is that it ranks all carbohydrates based on the way it affects blood sugar levels. Foods with low GI will not cause a spike in blood sugar, while those that are high on the GI list will. For your reference, a GI value of 70 or higher is considered high, 56—69 is considered medium, and 55 or lower is considered low.

While the GI method may sound easy in theory, it is not without its flaws. It fails to consider all variables that raise blood sugar, such as portion sizes and the cooking method. It also does not pay any mind to the nutritional content of the foods. Many foods that are low in GI may not be the healthiest choice (hello potato chips!), whereas fruits which are high in GI (like watermelon) can easily be incorporated into a healthy diabetic diet plan.

A better idea is to instead check the Glycemic Load — which takes into consideration both the GI of a food and the amount of carbohydrate/portion size.