

Eating Healthy around the Holidays

For People with Diabetes

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The holiday season is generally a time for celebrating and enjoying the company of friends and family. Unfortunately, it is also a time when people tend to eat more high-fat, high-calorie foods than they normally do. If you have diabetes and eat too much of the wrong foods over the holidays, your blood glucose level might rise higher than the target range. Avoiding the family gathering or office party may not be an option, but some careful thought and planning can go a long way to help you manage your blood glucose and still have a good time.



If making healthy food choices is already a daily habit, you will find it easier to make wise choices during the holidays.

Why is it important to manage blood glucose during the holidays?

Eating during the holidays should be no different from the way you eat everyday if you eat a moderate amount of foods that are high in nutrients and low in fat and calories. When you make healthy food choices you:

- Keep your blood glucose within the target range
- Better manage moods and feelings
- Have energy throughout the day
- Lower your risk for health problems such as heart attack, stroke, blindness, and loss of toes and feet

How can I eat healthfully every day, even during the holidays?

If making healthy food choices is already a daily habit, you will find it easier to make wise choices during the holidays.

These tips can serve as a checklist to help you choose your food wisely:

- Start your day with a healthy breakfast to help manage your weight. Include whole grains, fruit, low-fat dairy, and protein such as eggs, ham, or peanut butter.
- Choose vegetables and fruits that have a variety of colors. These foods are high in fiber and help keep your blood glucose under control. Include non-starchy vegetables such as spinach, carrots, broccoli, leaf lettuce, and cauliflower into your meals.
- Eat whole grains such as whole-wheat pasta, brown rice, and whole-grain bread.
- Choose a variety of protein foods. Include seafood, lean meat, chicken, turkey, eggs, beans and lentils, peas, soy products, and unsalted nuts and seeds.

Don't skip meals during the day to "save" calories and carbs so that you can eat a large holiday meal. If you skip meals, it will be harder to keep your blood glucose under control.

- Choose oils or soft margarine instead of stick margarine and butter that tend to be higher in saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol. Fats are high in calories, so it is important to watch your portion sizes.
- Cut back on high-calorie snack foods and desserts such as chips, cookies, cakes, and full-fat ice cream.
- Watch your portion sizes. Eating too much of even healthy foods can lead to weight gain and poor management of blood glucose.

How do I eat healthfully at parties?

Do not arrive hungry to a party. Have a small snack such as whole-grain crackers and cheese, raw vegetables, fruit, or low-fat yogurt before you go. Other tips include:

- Don't skip meals during the day to "save" calories and carbs so that you can eat a large holiday meal. If you skip meals, it will be harder to keep your blood glucose under control.
- If the meal will be served at your usual mealtime, try to eat your usual number of carbs. If you are planning to have dessert, cut back on carbs during the main meal.
- Don't rush to eat when you get to the event; spend some time socializing first. Try not to stand near a table with food to help you avoid unconscious nibbling.
- Practice portion control by using small plates. Place fruit, vegetables, and other healthy foods on your plate first.

- Drink water instead of sugar-sweetened drinks.
- Bring a diabetes-friendly dish to the party or social gathering. You can reduce the sugar and fat in many recipes.

How do I use alcohol in moderation?

Alcohol contains calories so use in moderation—up to one drink a day for women and two drinks a day for men. Begin with a calorie-free, nonalcoholic drink to satisfy your thirst before having an alcoholic drink. Remember to eat something before you drink to help prevent low blood glucose. The American Diabetes Association's guidelines for using alcohol are:

- Drink only when blood-glucose levels are under control. Test your blood glucose to help you determine the effects of the drink.
- Do not omit food from your regular meal plan.
- Sip the drink slowly to make it last.
- Keep a no-calorie drink by your side to quench your thirst.
- Try wine spritzers to decrease the amount of wine in the drink.
- Use calorie-free drink mixers—diet soda, club soda, diet tonic water, or water.
- Drink alcohol with a snack or meal. Some good snack ideas are pretzels, popcorn, crackers, fat-free or baked chips, and raw vegetables with a low-fat yogurt dip.
- Consult with a registered dietitian to help you fit alcohol into your meal plan.

- Wear identification that indicates you have diabetes.

How do I choose desserts wisely?

There are lots of sweets and desserts during the holidays. These foods often contain carbs and fat with few other nutrients. As a result, they can raise your blood glucose quickly and contribute to weight gain. But it is the holiday season, so consider the following options to be able to enjoy your desserts:

- Eat fruit as dessert. They add a sweet taste without adding many calories, and they also are a source of vitamins, minerals, and dietary fiber.
- Split a dessert with someone.
- Remove high-fat whipped topping and frosting.
- Eat fewer carbs during the main meal so that you can have a small dessert.

How do I choose snacks wisely?

Smart snacking can help curb hunger. In fact, many meal plans include two snacks. Many people think of snacks as foods that are high in sugar and fat such as potato chips, cookies, and chocolates. But, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and nuts are all examples of healthy snack options. Wise snacking can make a difference in managing weight and keeping your blood glucose under control (Table 1).

Table 1. Carbohydrate count of various snacks

Less than 5 grams	10-15 grams	Approximately 30 grams
3 celery sticks with 1 tablespoon of peanut butter	5 whole wheat crackers with 1 tablespoon peanut butter	1 slice whole wheat bread, 1 tablespoon peanut butter, and 1 cup milk
1 cup light popcorn (no butter added)	3 cups light popcorn	$\frac{3}{4}$ cup whole grain ready-to-eat cereal and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup fat-free milk
1 hard-boiled egg	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup tuna salad and 4 saltines	1 medium banana and 1 tablespoon peanut butter
5 baby carrots with 1 tablespoon of low-fat or reduced fat dressing	1 cup broccoli, cauliflower, cucumber, celery or combinations of these and $\frac{1}{3}$ cup hummus	
$\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar-free gelatin	1 small orange or apple	
	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup nuts	
	10 shrimp cocktail with sauce	

Source: American Diabetes Association

How do I cook healthfully?

Trying to eat healthily during the holidays can seem impossible. To help you take control, try some of these suggestions when preparing your favorite recipes:

Tips to reduce sugar

- You can reduce the amount of sugar in most recipes by 25 percent without much change to the flavor of the product. Try adding cinnamon or vanilla to recipes to give the idea of sweetness.
- Use unsweetened applesauce or sugar-free syrup in place of syrup.
- Use fresh fruit or fruits canned in their own juices or water in place of fruits canned in heavy syrup.

Tips to reduce salt

- Use a step-down approach to reducing salt. These steps result in lowering your taste for salt in food:
 - Gradually reduce the amount of salt used in cooking.
 - Cut the amount of salt in recipes by half.
 - Try leaving it out altogether, except in baking.
- Use fresh garlic and onion in place of garlic and onion salt.
- Use spices, herbs, and lemon juice instead of salt to season foods.
- Rinse canned vegetables before using or choose low-salt versions.

Tips to reduce fat

- Replace solid fats such as butter, lard, stick margarine, and shortening with oils when you are cooking.
- Replace half of the fat or oil in recipes with unsweetened applesauce.
- Use cooking spray in place of oil when cooking.
- Use low-fat or fat-free versions of milk, cheese, and cream.
- Use two egg whites in place of each egg or use an egg substitute.
- Use Canadian bacon or turkey bacon in place of bacon.
- Remove fat from chicken, beef, and other meat.
- Remove the skin from chicken or turkey.
- Choose baked, steamed, or broiled foods rather than fried foods.
- Read the Nutrition Facts label to choose foods with little or no saturated fat and no trans fat.

Resources

National Diabetes Education Program. <http://ndep.nih.gov/index.aspx>.

National Diabetes Education Program. Tasty recipes for people with diabetes and their families. http://ndep.nih.gov/media/MQC_recipebook_english.pdf.

American Diabetes Association. Food and fitness. www.diabetes.org/food-and-fitness/food.

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