

# Just the Basics

## Understanding Diabetes

Diabetes means your body cannot properly use and store food for energy. The fuel your body needs is called **glucose (sugar)**, which comes from foods like fruits, milk, vegetables, and grains. To control your blood sugar, you need healthy eating, physical activity, and sometimes medication (pills or insulin).

## Tips for a Healthy Meal Before Seeing a Registered Dietitian:

- **Eat 3 meals at regular intervals** and no more than 6 hours apart, as it helps the body to control blood glucose levels.
- Consumption of **sugar and sweets should be limited** as it will increase blood glucose levels.
- **Artificial sweeteners can be useful substitutes for sugar.**
- **High-fat food should be limited** to reduce the risk of weight gain and cardiovascular disease.
- **Regular physical activity helps improve** blood glucose levels.
- **High fibre meals** help reduce blood glucose levels, e.g.: whole grain bread and cereal, lentils, dry beans, brown rice, vegetables and fruits.

## Plan For Healthy Eating

- **Eat more vegetables and green salads.** These are very high in nutrients and low in calories. This should take up half of your plate.
- **Choose fish, chicken and lean meat.** Select more **vegetable protein** such as beans or chickpeas. These proteins should take up one quarter of your plate.
- **Select plant oils** such as olive and canola, **and nuts** instead of animal fats, coconut or palm oil. This should be no more than the tip of your finger.
- **Eat small portions of grains and starches**, such as yuca/cassava, corn, and boiled or baked plantains. Try to **choose lower glycemic-index** foods like whole grain tortillas, brown rice, and quinoa. These grains and starches should be about a quarter of your plate.
- **Include low-fat milk** or plain yogurt and a piece of fruit to complete your meal.

It's natural to have questions about what food to eat. A Registered Dietitian can help you include your favourite foods in a personalized meal plan.

## Sample Meal Plan (For Smaller Appetites)

### Breakfast

- Choose whole grain toast (2 slices)
- Peanut butter (2 tbsp or 30 mL)
- Low fat milk (1 cup or 250 mL)

- Tea or coffee
- 1 orange

## Lunch

1 chicken wrap which can be made from:

- 1 whole grain tortilla (10 inch or 25 cm in length is regular wrap size)
- Baked chicken (2 oz or 60g is about the size of your palm)
- 1/6 portion of avocado – small portion to add flavour
- Lettuce, tomatoes and cucumbers as per your preference
- Salsa or mayonnaise, ranch or Caesar dressing (1 tbsp or 15 mL)

## Dinner

Vegetable and bean stew which can be made from:

- Black beans ( $\frac{1}{2}$  cup or 12 mL)
- Corn ( $\frac{1}{2}$  cup or 125 mL)
- Potatoes ( $\frac{1}{2}$  cup or 125 mL)
- Onion, zucchini, peas and carrots

Brown rice (2/3 cup or 150 mL)

Tea or coffee

## Evening Snack

$\frac{1}{2}$  medium mango, 7 almonds

# Sample Meal Plan (For Bigger Appetites)

## Breakfast

- Hot cereal ( $\frac{3}{4}$  cup, 175 mL)
- Whole grain toast (2 slices)
- 1 scrambled egg with tomatoes, peppers, and onions
- Low-fat milk (1 cup, 250 mL)
- Tea or coffee

## Lunch

- Brown rice (1 cup, 250 mL)
- Boiled beans ( $\frac{1}{2}$  cup, 125 mL)
- Lean beef steak (3 oz, 90 g)
- Stewed zucchini and carrots
- Green salad – lettuce, tomato, cucumber
- Dressing: lime juice and olive oil (1 tsp, 5 mL)
- 1 orange
- Tea or coffee

## Afternoon Snack

- Grapes ( $\frac{1}{2}$  cup, 125 mL)
- Cocoa with 1% or skim milk (1 cup, 250 mL)

## Dinner

- 1 large potato or 2 whole grain tortillas (6 inch, 15 cm)
- Baked fish (4 oz, 120 g)
- Green beans
- Green salad with low-fat salad dressing (1 tsp, 5 mL)
- Pineapple (2 slices,  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup)
- Low-fat plain yogurt ( $\frac{3}{4}$  cup, 175 mL)
- Tea or coffee

## Evening Snack

- Low-fat cheese (e.g., partially skimmed mozzarella) (1 oz, 30 g)
- Whole grain crackers (4)
- 1 small banana

## Handy Portions Guide

Your hands can be useful in guiding your portion sizes when planning a meal.

- Grains/starches and fruits – choose an amount that is the size of your fist per meal.
- Vegetables – choose as much as you can hold in both hands per meal. Try to select brightly colored vegetables.
- Meat and alternatives – choose an amount the size of your palm and the thickness of your pinky finger per meal
- Fats – try to limit fat to the size to the tip of your thumb per meal
- Milk and alternatives – drink up to 1 cup of low-fat milk per meal

## Follow a Healthy Lifestyle

- At each meal, include **at least 3 of the 4 food groups** from *Canada's Food Guide*:
  - **Vegetables and fruit** – choose fresh, frozen, or canned options without added sugar or salt.

- **Grain products** – try whole grain breads, cereals, or brown rice (use tactile labels or different container shapes to identify foods).
- **Milk and alternatives** – select skim or low-fat milk, or fortified soy beverages.
- **Meat and alternatives** – include lean meats, fish, eggs, beans, lentils, or tofu.
- Choose **high-fibre foods** like whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and legumes to support steady blood sugar levels.
- Select **lower-fat options** (e.g. lean meats, skinless poultry, small amounts of oil or dressing).
- Maintain **an active lifestyle**

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