

Patient Handout

Grocery Shopping 101: Shopping Smart to Manage Your Diabetes

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Food shopping when you have diabetes can be challenging, but it also can be an enjoyable experience when you have a plan. This guide will help give you a better understanding of how to get organized before going to your grocery store and how to navigate the store once you get there.

Make a List

Deciding what healthy foods you need to buy and then making a shopping list helps you get organized before you go to the store and keeps you on task once you get there. *IF SOMETHING IS NOT ON THE LIST, DO NOT BUY IT*, unless the item is fresh produce or a lean protein that looks particularly good that day. *DO NOT SHOP WHEN YOU ARE HUNGRY*; you may be tempted to buy sweets and fatty foods.

Read the Nutrition Facts Label

The Nutrition Facts label is your best tool for shopping smart to manage your diabetes. You need to be aware of *serving sizes* and *servings per container*, as well as *total carbohydrates* and *dietary fiber* to aid in carbohydrate counting. You should look for foods that are made of whole grains with low amounts of sugar, salt (sodium), and hydrogenated (*trans*) fat.

The following items are listed on a Nutrition Facts label:

- **Serving Sizes and Servings per Container:** The size of the serving (eg, one-half cup, 16 chips) influences the number of servings per container, the number of calories you are eating, and the amounts of each nutrient (eg, calcium, vitamin C) the serving contains.
- **Calories:** Calories (eg, 150 calories) provide a measure of how much energy you get from 1 serving of a food. The number of servings you consume, or your portion amount, determines the number of calories you actually eat.
- **Calories from Fat:** This indicates how many of the total calories per serving come from fat (eg, 50 of the 150 calories). Only 30% of your daily calories should come from fat.
- **Percent (%) Daily Value:** These numbers indicate how much (%) of the daily allowance of fat, cholesterol, sodium, carbohydrates, and protein 1 serving of a food contains. These values are based on a diet of 2000 calories per day. However, talk to your health care provider because, as a person with diabetes, your needs may be different.
- **Total Fat:** The amount of total fat per serving is measured in grams (eg, 6 g) and percentages (eg, 9%) of total daily calories (eg, 2000 calories).
- **Saturated Fat and Trans Fat:** These are considered “bad” fats because they tend to promote heart disease. These fats should make up no more than 5% of your total calories per day. In fact, you should strive for 0 g and 0% of *trans* fat in your foods.
- **Unsaturated Fat:** This is considered a “good” fat because it tends to be heart healthy. This fat should make up no more than 10% of your total calories per day.
- **Cholesterol:** Limit the amount of cholesterol in your food to 300 milligrams (mg) a day.
- **Sodium:** Limit the amount of sodium in your food to 2300 mg a day, unless your health care provider gives you other instructions.
- **Total Carbohydrate:** This includes total dietary fiber, sugars, and other carbohydrates.
- **Dietary Fiber:** Look for foods with 3 to 5 g of dietary fiber per serving. If a food has ≥ 5 g of fiber, those grams can be subtracted from the number of total carbohydrates because fiber cannot be digested. For example, a food that has 22 g of total carbohydrates and 5 g of fiber counts as 17 g of carbohydrates.
- **Sugars:** This includes natural sugars (eg, the natural sugar in raisins) and added sugars (eg, honey). You should *FOCUS ON TOTAL CARBOHYDRATES* since that number will more accurately predict the effects a food will have on your blood glucose level after the food is eaten.
- **Protein:** Be sure to eat the amount of protein your health care provider recommends. Use lean protein sources, such as skinless poultry, fish, low-fat dairy products, and beans.

Understanding “Sugar Free”

A food that contains ≤ 0.5 g of sugar per serving may be labeled as “sugar free.” However, sugar-free products often have the same number of calories and the same amount of fat as products that are not sugar free. These products generally are not beneficial to persons with diabetes. Sugar alcohols are often used in place of sugar to produce sugar-free cookies, ice cream, and candy. Sugar alcohols are digested and absorbed gradually and may have a laxative effect.¹

Navigating Your Grocery Store

Start with the perimeter, or the walls, of the store; this is where the fresh produce, meats, fish, deli, and dairy products are located. Although these items are perishable, it is smart to start here since your cart is empty and you can fill it with these healthy foods. Then you can work your way into the center of the store.

Produce

All foods in the produce section are acceptable because they are generally lower in calories, and they provide vitamins, minerals, fiber, and antioxidants. But take special care when choosing starchy vegetables, such as peas, corn, potatoes, winter squash, and legumes (eg, lentils). Consider their carbohydrate content when evaluating their serving size.

Try varying your diet with different colored fruits each day. All fruits can be eaten, but just remember to account for the carbohydrate content in your serving. For example, a small (4-ounce) banana contains 15 g of carbohydrates, which is equal to 1 serving of fruit. A digital kitchen scale can be used to weigh the fruit for portion control and consistent blood glucose readings.

Meats and Fish

Always choose fish, skinless poultry, and meats with little marbling. “Marbling” is fat that runs through the meat. Skinless poultry has 40 to 60 calories per ounce, whereas marbled red meats may contain >100 calories per ounce. Although meats do not contain carbohydrates, their saturated fat content contributes to heart disease. Limiting the amount of saturated fats you eat will help to control weight and cholesterol levels.

Options at the Deli

Key words at the deli are *low sodium*, *lean*, *reduced fat*, and *natural*. Both meats and cheeses can be found in these varieties. Packages containing individually wrapped 1-ounce portions of reduced-fat cheeses, such as string cheese, are convenient and can help with portion control. Part-skim cheeses, including mozzarella, are lower-fat and reduced-calorie options.

Dairy Products

Dairy foods vary in fat and calorie content. Choose 1% or skim milk and low-fat or nonfat yogurt to cut back on fat and calories. For example, choosing reduced-fat cheeses can save you 30 to 40 calories per ounce and 3 g of fat. For soft cheeses, such as ricotta and cottage cheese, choosing the lower-fat varieties will also reduce your calorie and fat intake. Dairy foods also vary in carbohydrate content, with milk having the most carbohydrates and cheese having the least. Although choosing low-fat or nonfat milk or cheeses will reduce fat and calories, the carbohydrate content will be the same as for the whole milk and regular cheese choices. Egg substitutes are good options because they are made with egg whites and are typically lower in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol than regular eggs.

Nuts and Oils

Heart-healthy fats, such as omega-3 fatty acids and monounsaturated fat, can be found in several types of nuts and oils. Omega-3 fatty acids are found in walnuts, canola oil, flaxseed, and the oil of fish such as salmon. Almonds and olive oil are good sources of monounsaturated fat. But it is important to watch your portions because nuts and oils are high in calories.

The Bread Aisle

The bread aisle can be confusing if you are not familiar with food labels and ingredient lists. Look for the words “made with *whole grains*” and “100% *whole wheat*.” Whole wheat or other whole grains should be the first ingredient listed. Terms such as *9 grain*, *100% stone ground*, and *wheat bread* do not mean that the breads were made with whole grains. Whole grains are packed with antioxidants, vitamins, minerals, and fiber. Keep the following guidelines in mind when purchasing your bread:

- Buy bread that has 2 to 4 g of fiber per serving.
- Choose whole grains or 100% whole wheat.
- Look for a bread that contains equal amounts of sodium and calories per serving (eg, 120 calories and 120 mg of sodium per slice).

- 1 ounce of bread = 15 g of carbohydrates. But not all breads are created equal. A slice from one brand can be twice as big as that from another brand. Read the food label or use a digital kitchen scale to weigh the bread for portion control and consistent blood glucose readings.

Grains: Rice, Pasta, Oats, Barley, and Quinoa

Whole grains are more beneficial than processed grains because they have more nutrients and are higher in fiber. Whole grains such as oats and barley, which are high in soluble fiber, help lower blood cholesterol.² This helps to lower the risk of heart disease. These grains usually have fewer calories than breads, and they often contain less sodium.

Try incorporating the following whole grains into your meal plan. Each serving listed is equal to 15 g of carbohydrates.

- Bran, bulgur, grits, kasha, oats, quinoa (one-half cup).
- Couscous, millet, whole wheat pasta, brown rice (one-third cup).

Cereals: Cold and Hot

Your best choices are whole-grain, high-fiber cereals with no added sugar or salt. Be sure to read food labels so you can make good choices, such as shredded wheat biscuits and 100% bran cereals. For accurate portion control and consistent blood glucose readings, use a digital kitchen scale to weigh your cereal and measure your milk with a liquid measuring cup.

Guidelines for Choosing a Cold Cereal

- At least 4 to 5 g of fiber per serving.
- Less than 3 g of fat per serving.
- No more than 5 to 8 g of sugar per serving. But focus on the total carbohydrates per serving, as this is the most important factor when trying to control blood glucose levels.
- No more than 140 mg of sodium per serving.

Guidelines for Choosing a Hot Cereal

- The best choice is rolled oats. Eight ounces of cooked oatmeal contains about the same amount of calories as 1 ounce of cold cereal.
- Choose natural rolled oats and flavor your cereal with fresh fruit, spices, or a sugar substitute (eg, Splenda, Equal, Sunett, Sweet One, Sweet'N Low).

Canned Goods

Canned fruits and vegetables can be part of a healthy diet. The products are already cleaned, washed, chopped, and peeled, making them convenient as well. Canned fruits and vegetables are nutritionally equivalent to fresh and frozen. But choose varieties that state "No Added Salt" or "No Added Sugar" on the label. If the food label indicates that the product has $\geq 5\%$ of the Daily Value for sodium, salt has usually been added. Avoid foods in sauces or syrup.

Frozen Foods

- Healthy frozen foods include vegetables, fish, poultry, and unsweetened fruits. But avoid choices with sauces, oils, or butters and those that are breaded or battered.
- Dinner assembly kits with vegetables, a starch (such as potato, rice, or pasta), and a sauce can be modified. Use only one quarter to one third of the sauce and add more vegetables.
- Prepared frozen meals are usually high in fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium; these should be avoided. Even the "diet" or "healthier" brands are high in sodium and should be limited.
- Always read labels and ingredients to find out what is in your frozen food.

Checkout

The variety of candy, snacks, and soft drinks available at the checkout aisle can challenge a successful shopping trip. Here are some strategies to help you avoid making last-minute impulse purchases:

- If you do not have too many items in your cart, use one of the self-checkout stations.
- Read a magazine as you wait. This will keep you busy until it is your turn to pay for and bag your groceries.

Wrapping It Up

Whether you are trying to maintain good glucose control or to lose weight, eating a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and low-fat dairy products can help you achieve your goal. Remember to have a shopping list and buy only what is on the list. It all starts with the foods you choose to place in your cart.

REFERENCES

1. US Food and Drug Administration. Letter regarding sugar-free claim. <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/lclmguid.html>. Accessed September 13, 2007.
2. American Heart Association. Choose Whole Grain, High Fiber Foods. <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3040347>. Accessed September 13, 2007.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- American Diabetes Association. The Diabetes Pyramid: Grains and Starches. <http://www.diabetes.org/nutrition-and-recipes/nutrition/starches.jsp>.
- US Food and Drug Administration. How to Understand and Use the Nutrition Facts Label. <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/foodlab.html>.
- American Heart Association. The Heart of Diabetes. <http://www.americanheart.org>.