

Best and Worst Foods for Diabetes

Best Choices

- Whole grains, such as brown rice, oatmeal, quinoa, millet, or amaranth
- Baked sweet potato
- Items made with whole grains and no (or very little) added sugar

Worst Choices

- Processed grains, such as white rice or white flour
- Cereals with little whole grains and lots of sugar
- White bread
- French fries
- Fried white-flour tortillas

Vegetables

Load up! You'll get fiber and very little fat or salt (unless you add them). Remember, potatoes and corn count as carbs.

Best Choices

- Fresh veggies, eaten raw or lightly steamed, roasted, or grilled
- Plain frozen vegetables, lightly steamed
- Greens such as kale, spinach, and arugula. Iceberg lettuce is not as great, because it's low in nutrients.
- Low sodium or unsalted canned vegetables

Go for a variety of colors: dark greens, red or orange (think of carrots or red peppers), whites (onions) and even purple (eggplants). The 2015 U.S. guidelines recommend 2.5 cups of veggies per day.

Worst Choices

- Canned vegetables with lots of added sodium
- Veggies cooked with lots of added butter, cheese, or sauce
- Pickles, if you need to limit sodium -- otherwise, pickles are okay.
- Sauerkraut, for the same reason as pickles -- so, limit them if you have high blood pressure

Fruits

They give you carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, and fiber. Most are naturally low in fat and sodium. But they tend to have more carbs than vegetables do.

Best Choices

- Fresh fruit
- Plain frozen fruit or fruit canned without added sugar
- Sugar-free or low-sugar jam or preserves
- No-sugar-added applesauce

Worst Choices

- Canned fruit with heavy sugar syrup
- Chewy fruit rolls
- Regular jam, jelly, and preserves (unless you have a very small portion)
- Sweetened applesauce
- Fruit punch, fruit drinks, fruit juice drinks

Protein

You have lots of choices, including beef, chicken, fish, pork, turkey, seafood, beans, cheese, eggs, nuts, and tofu.

Best Choices

The American Diabetes Association lists these as the top options:

- Plant-based proteins, such as beans, nuts, seeds, or tofu
- Fish and seafood
- Chicken and other poultry (Choose the breast meat if possible.)
- Eggs and low-fat dairy

If you eat meat, keep it low in fat. Trim the skin off poultry.

Try to include some plant-based protein from beans, nuts, or tofu, even if you're not a vegetarian or vegan. You'll get nutrients and fiber that aren't in animal products.

Worst Choices

- Fried meats
- Higher-fat cuts of meat, such as ribs
- Pork bacon
- Regular cheeses
- Poultry with skin
- Deep-fried fish
- Deep-fried tofu
- Beans prepared with lard

Dairy

Keep it low in fat. If you want to splurge, keep your portion small.

Best Choices

- 1% or skim milk
- Low-fat yogurt
- Low-fat cottage cheese
- Low-fat or nonfat sour cream

Worst Choices

- Whole milk
- Regular yogurt
- Regular cottage cheese
- Regular sour cream
- Regular ice cream
- Regular half-and-half

Fats, Oils, and Sweets

They're tough to resist. But it's easy to get too much and gain weight, which makes it harder to manage your diabetes.

Best Choices

- Natural sources of vegetable fats, such as nuts, seeds, or avocados (high in calories, so keep portions small)
- Foods that give you omega-3 fatty acids, such as salmon, tuna, or mackerel
- Plant-based oils, such as canola, grapeseed, or olive oils

Worst Choices

- Anything with artificial trans fat in it. It's bad for your heart. Check the ingredient list for anything that's "partially hydrogenated," even if the label says it has 0 grams of trans fat.
- Big portions of saturated fats, which mainly come from animal products but also are in coconut oil and palm oil. Ask your doctor what your limit should be, especially if you have heart disease as well as diabetes.

Drinks

When you down a favorite drink, you may get more calories, sugar, salt, or fat than you bargained for. Read the labels so you know what's in a serving.

Best Choices

- Water, unflavored or flavored sparkling water
- Unsweetened tea (add a slice of lemon)
- Light beer, small amounts of wine, or non-fruity mixed drinks
- Coffee, black or with added low-fat milk and sugar substitute

Worst Choices

- Regular sodas
- Regular beer, fruity mixed drinks, dessert wines
- Sweetened tea
- Coffee with sugar and cream
- Flavored coffees and chocolate drinks
- Energy drinks

WebMD Medical Reference

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