

Brakes guide to Diabetes

What is diabetes?

When sugars from food are digested, they are absorbed into the blood stream. Insulin is a hormone that takes sugar from the blood to other cells in the body to be used as fuel for energy.

Diabetes is a serious, lifelong condition where the body either doesn't make enough insulin or the insulin it does make doesn't work properly. If left untreated, high levels of sugar in the blood can cause serious health complications.

How many people does it effect?

4.3 million people are now living with a diagnosis of diabetes in the UK*. It's estimated that there are also 850,000 people living with diabetes who are yet to be diagnosed, bringing the overall UK-wide figure beyond five million. *Diabetes UK

The Eatwell Guide

The Eatwell Guide shows the different types and proportions of foods that we need to eat a healthy, balanced diet. The proportions shown represent food intake over a period of a day or even a week, not necessarily each meal. The Eatwell Guide divides foods into five main groups.

Try to offer a variety of different foods from each of the groups, to help people get the wide range of nutrients their body needs to function properly.

Caring for people with diabetes

The advice for people with diabetes is to reach and maintain a healthy weight, to follow a balanced diet, do regular physical activity, give up smoking and to drink alcohol in moderation. This advice is also given to the rest of the population, not just to people with diabetes.

Having diabetes doesn't mean sugar has to be completely avoided, it can be included as part of a balanced diet. Choose healthier cooking methods such as steaming rather than boiling and grilling instead of deep frying. Microwaving can be a healthier option too as food is cooked much quicker therefore vitamin retention is maximised.



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Diabetic food labelling

Labelling foods as 'suitable for diabetics' has been illegal in the UK since July 2016 because these foods offer no benefit to people with diabetes. These foods contradict general healthy eating advice, which is to eat foods that are high in sugar and/or fat, less often and in small amounts. In addition, these foods can:

- Be as high in fat and calories as standard products
- Still raise blood sugar levels
- Have a laxative effect if eaten in excess
- Be expensive



Hints and tips to help people with diabetes eat well

1. Offer regular and evenly spaced meals and snacks throughout the day.
2. Provide starchy carbohydrates such as bread, rice, potatoes and pasta with every meal. Leave the skin on potatoes and include a variety of wholegrain options too such as wholemeal bread, wholewheat pasta and brown rice.
3. Although some fat is needed in the diet, limit the amount of saturated fat from foods like butter, cheese, processed meats, cakes and biscuits. Too much saturated fat can increase the risk of heart disease.
4. Offer at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables each day. Serve as accompaniments with every meal and offer as snacks too.
5. Limit salt - don't add salt during cooking, people can add it to their meals if they choose to.
6. Offer at least 2 portions of fish each week, 1 of which should be oily fish like salmon, mackerel and sardines. Oily fish contain omega 3 fats which can help reduce the risk of heart disease.
7. Beans, peas and pulses are good sources of protein so add kidney beans, chickpeas and lentils to your dishes. They are also high in fibre, low in fat and can help control blood fat levels.
8. Sugary foods don't need to be totally excluded. Small and occasional portions of cakes, desserts and biscuits are acceptable. Look out for reduced sugar or sugar free products and consider reducing some sugar in food and drinks, and replacing with sweeteners.
9. Keep people hydrated, offer at least 6-8 drinks each day. They should be available with every meal and regularly in between meals too. Water, milk, squash, fruit juice (no more than 150ml) tea and coffee all count as fluids.