PATIENT HANDOUT

Healthy Eating for Diabetes

Healthy eating is beneficial for everyone, but it carries even greater importance for people with diabetes.

The type and amounts of food you eat can cause swings in your blood glucose (blood sugar) levels. Here are some important tips.

MAP IT OUT

Following a meal plan helps improve your blood glucose, blood pressure and cholesterol numbers. People with diabetes have make sure that food intake is balanced with insulin, oral medications and exercise to help manage blood glucose levels. Your physician, therapist or dietitian can help you create an appropriate meal plan.

The American Diabetes Association (ADA) has published nutrition recommendations based on specific medical conditions for people who are at risk for diabetes. They recommend these benchmarks:

- Eat fiber-rich foods (14 grams of fiber for every 1,000 calories). Whole grains should make up half of all grain intake.
- Achieve and maintain a healthy body weight. Lose weight if necessary. Medications may be useful for some people, but they must be combined with lifestyle changes. For people who are obese, weight loss surgery might be appropriate.
- Exercise. Exercise helps lower blood glucose levels, increases insulin sensitivity and improves cardiovascular risk

If you've already been diagnosed with diabetes, follow these guidelines:

- Obtain carbohydrates from fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes and low-fat or skim milk.
- Keep saturated fats to less than 7 percent of your total caloric intake per day.
- Eat at least two servings of nonfried fish each week.
- Limit your intake of trans fats.
- Restrict cholesterol intake to less than 200 mg per day.
- Eat smaller portions.
- Choose nonfat or low-fat dairy products.
- Eat only lean meats.
- Remove the skin from chicken.
- Eat at least five servings of vegetables and fruits every day.
- Split entrees and desserts with others when eating out.
- Ask for dressings, sour cream and sauces on the side.

THE CARB CONUNDRUM

Because many people with diabetes are instructed by their doctors to lose weight, you may be tempted to investigate the recent trend of restricted-carbohydrate diets as a form of weight control. But the ADA strongly cautions against these low-carb diets, claiming that recent research supports the importance of diets containing carbohydrates from whole grains, fruits, vegetables and low-fat milk.

Counting carbohydrates is an important element of meal planning and keeping your blood glucose on target. Examples of carbohydrate foods are bread, crackers, cereal, pasta, rice, corn, sweet potatoes, beans, fruit, milk, yogurt, sugary sweets and popcorn.

If you eat more of those foods than you should, your blood glucose level is likely to be higher than usual several hours later. Ask your practitioner to determine your recommended number of carbohydrate servings, based on your weight, activity level, diabetes medications and blood glucose goal.

For many people, having three to four servings of carbohydrate foods at each meal and one or two servings for snacks works well. One carbohydrate serving is equal to 15 grams of carbohydrate. Pay attention to the "total carbohydrate" listing on nutrition labels.

READ THE FINE PRINT

Reading food labels can help you make wise food choices. Most packaged foods list nutrition information in a section called Nutrition Facts. In that section, you'll find the serving size and the amount of nutrients per serving.

When looking at the label, ask yourself how the serving size compares with your usual serving. If the serving size listed on the cereal box is 1 cup, but you usually eat 2 cups, be sure to double all of the numbers in the nutrition facts section.

To make heart-healthy food choices, compare labels of similar foods. Choose the product with a smaller amount of saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium. Select foods with more fiber. Keep in mind that fat-free foods can be higher in carbohydrates and contain almost the same calories as the foods they replace. For example, fat-free cookies are not necessarily a better choice than the standard product, so read labels carefully.

Information adapted from the American Diabetes Association at www.diabetes.org

NOTES

Your doctor or therapist has given you this patient education handout to further explain or remind you about an issue related to your health. This handout is a general guide only. If you have specific questions, discuss them with your doctor or therapist.

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