



Insulin Dependent Diabetes Trust

Type 2 and You
April 2010



Welcome to the third issue of Type 2 and You. In this issue we look at healthy eating for people with diabetes, what it is and how to do it. We also report on a study that suggests that people may be having episodes of hypoglycaemia unnecessarily.

So What Is A Healthy Diet?

When people are first diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes, often one of the first and arguably most important pieces of advice they are given is to eat a healthy diet. Unfortunately however, this is where the advice often stops. So, what is a healthy diet and more importantly, what is a healthy diet for someone with diabetes?

The official guidance from the Food Standards Agency (FSA) is to eat a balanced diet by following the eatwell plate.

The eatwell plate shows how much of what you should eat, should come from each food group. This includes everything you eat during the day, including snacks.

The FSA advise that we should try to eat:

- Plenty of fruit and vegetables, five portions a day.
- Plenty of bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods, choosing wholegrain varieties where possible.
- Some milk and dairy foods.
- Some meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein.
- Just a small amount of food and drinks that are high in saturated fat and/or sugar.



All of this is very sound advice for the vast majority of people. However for people with diabetes these guidelines need to be approached with some degree of caution for a couple of reasons.

Firstly, while fruit and vegetables are a vital source of vitamins and minerals, people with diabetes need to be aware that fruit also contains fructose, a sugar that will raise blood sugar levels when eaten. Also, many fruit juices contain added sugar, so while they can count as one (and only one, regardless of the amount you drink!) of your five a day, they can raise blood sugar levels further. Vegetables, on the other hand do not contain significant amounts of sugar and will not raise blood sugar levels.

Secondly, people with diabetes will need to be aware that starchy foods contain carbohydrates which are essential to providing the body with energy but will raise blood sugar levels. Different carbohydrates affect each of us differently and it is important that people with diabetes learn which types of food, in which amounts, affect them in which ways. One way to do this is through regular blood testing throughout the day to see the effect that different types of food have on blood sugar levels. This is one reason why IDDT believe that all people should have the choice to test their blood. By doing this it is possible to learn how to help keep blood sugar levels within recommended levels and avoid highs and lows as much as possible.

There are many benefits to eating a healthy balanced diet. Taking steps to balance your diet will help you control your:

- Blood sugar levels.
- Cholesterol.
- Blood pressure.

It will also help regulate your weight. If you are overweight, losing weight will help you control your diabetes and will also reduce your risk of heart disease, high blood pressure and stroke.

Remember it is better in the long run to make small, gradual changes to your diet that you can stick to, rather than large sweeping changes that are unrealistic. Here are some tips to help you eat a healthy diet.

Keep a check on the amount of carbohydrates you eat

Carbohydrates provide the body with energy. Eating too much without taking sufficient exercise will lead to weight gain, not eating enough will lead to low blood sugar levels. Choosing wholegrain varieties will mean that the carbohydrates are absorbed more slowly and will give more even blood sugar levels. Controlling the amount of carbohydrates you eat can help you lose and/or maintain weight. However, fats are a much bigger culprit for weight gain. Gram for gram they contain more than twice the number of calories than starchy foods, so you need to watch the fats you add when cooking or serving food.

Eat fruit and vegetables

You should try to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. You can choose from fresh, frozen, tinned, dried or juiced, however don't forget that fruit will raise your blood sugar levels and that potatoes count as a starchy food that contains carbohydrate, not as one of your five a day.

Eat more fish

You should aim to eat at least two but no more than four portions of oily fish each week. A portion is about 140g. Examples of oily fish are salmon, mackerel, trout, herring, fresh tuna, sardines and pilchards. Remember that canned and smoked fish can be high in salt.

Cut down on saturated fat and sugar

Eating too much saturated fat can increase the level of cholesterol in the blood which in turn increases the risk of heart disease. You should try to eat foods containing saturated fats in smaller amounts or less often. Foods that contain saturated fats include meat pies, sausages, meat with visible white fat, hard cheese, butter, lard, cakes, pastry, biscuits and cream.

Foods that contain a lot of sugar have a high calorie content and can cause weight gain. They can also cause high 'spikes' in blood sugar levels so should be avoided unless your blood sugar levels are low and you are going 'hypo'.

Try to eat less salt

You should try to eat no more than 6g of salt a day. Three quarters of the salt we eat is already in the food we buy so you could easily be eating too much salt without realising it. Eating too much salt can raise your blood pressure and can cause heart disease or an increased risk of having a stroke, so try to avoid adding extra salt to the food you are cooking or eating.

Don't skip breakfast

Breakfast provides us with the energy we need to face the day and is a good opportunity to eat a couple of portions of your five a day. Skipping breakfast can lead to low blood sugar levels and there is

also some evidence to suggest that eating a healthy breakfast can actually help people to control their weight.

Hidden Hypos

A recent survey has suggested that people with Type 2 diabetes are having episodes of hypoglycaemia (hypos) unnecessarily. It found that of the 2000 people involved in the study half had experienced symptoms of a hypo in the previous two weeks.

The study focused on mild to moderate hypos, which often come with warning signs such as feeling shaky, sweating, tingling in the lips, going pale, heart pounding, confusion and irritability. More than half of those questioned said that hypos affected their quality of life and one in ten reported having to take at least one day off work in the last year as a result of a hypo. A third of the sample group said that hypos affected their ability to carry out day-to-day tasks, such as housework, social activities, sports activities and sleep.

There can be several causes of hypoglycaemia, including taking too much medication, delayed or missed meals, not eating enough carbohydrate and doing more exercise than usual. One group of drugs that are commonly used to treat Type 2 diabetes - sulphonylureas (medicines such as Glibenclamide, Diamicon, Gliclazide, Amaryl, Glimepiride, Glibenese, Glipizide, Minodiab) - can lead to hypos (the people in the study were not using insulin, which can also cause hypos). GPs have pointed out that modern sulphonylureas are quite powerful and that with the increasing pressure on doctors to ensure that peoples' blood sugars are tightly controlled, the study suggests that some people may be over-treated.

The study seems to suggest, and if follow up studies confirm the results, that while people are appearing to manage their hypos, they should not necessarily be having so many of them in the first place.

If you are having regular hypos, then IDDT recommends that you get advice from your medical team or GP on how to manage your diabetes - it maybe that you need to make some changes to your diet or lifestyle. It may be that you need a lower dose of medication.

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IDDT Quarterly Publications — Your Choice

As IDDT has grown so has the number of quarterly free, publications we produce. People who live with diabetes require different information, often according to the type of diabetes they have and the treatment they are given. For example, parents and children with Type 1 diabetes need different information from adults with Type 1 diabetes and people with Type 2 diabetes on diet and/or tablets require different information from people with Type 2 diabetes taking insulin.

IDDT produces the following quarterly publications:

- The Newsletter [for people taking insulin, both Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes]
- The Parents Bulletin [for parents of children with type 1 diabetes]
- Type 2 and You [for people on diet and/or tablets]

IDDT produces a wide range of free information leaflets, including information on Carbohydrates, Hypoglycaemia, Diet and Exercise and Exercise and your Heart. These can be sent by post or downloaded from our new website.

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