



Jennifer Dutton  
Regional Extension Agent  
News Release

## **Diabetes and Your Diet**

If you or a family member is newly diagnosed with diabetes, you may feel that you can no longer enjoy your favorite foods. However, there is no need to buy special foods or follow a complicated diet. You can still have your favorite foods, but portion sizes and timing of meals and snacks need to be planned so that you do not take in too much carbohydrate in one sitting. If your diet has been less than healthy in the past, you will need to make a few lifestyle changes, but you have more control over your health than you may think.

Many people think that they should not eat any foods with carbohydrate after being diagnosed with diabetes. This is far from the truth. Everyone should eat a variety of fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Complex carbohydrates like whole grains, fruits, legumes, vegetables, non-fat or low fat milk and yogurt contain a high volume of vitamins, minerals, fiber and protein in proportion to their calorie content.

The emphasis should be on non-starchy vegetables. These include foods like green beans, celery, broccoli and cauliflower, asparagus, artichoke, tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, spinach, zucchini, summer squash and others. Non-starchy vegetables should cover half of your plate. These vegetables are high in fiber and water which will help you feel full, and the fiber will help slow down the release of carbohydrate into your bloodstream.

Next, you can choose a starch to cover one quarter of your plate. Choose whole grain breads, whole grain brown rice, whole wheat pasta, legumes, cereal grains such as buckwheat, quinoa, and bulgur, as well as root crops like yams and sweet potatoes. Try to keep cooked grains and legumes to a ½ cup portion size. One slice of bread or ½ of a medium sweet potato would be the correct portion size. If you choose to consume starchy vegetables such as corn, peas, or white potatoes, the serving size is also ½ cup. You do not have to give up the foods you love, but it is important to measure the correct portion size and spread your carbohydrate load evenly throughout the day.

The remaining quarter of your plate can be filled with a protein serving of about the size of a deck of cards. Pure protein sources such as fresh fish, poultry and meat contain no carbohydrate. However, if you choose to consume breaded meats, remember to take into consideration the carbohydrate in the breading. Also, if you are a vegetarian, remember that your protein will come from combined plant sources such as corn and beans which contain carbohydrate.

These guidelines can also help you choose a healthy breakfast. Your best bet will be bran cereals, steel cut oats, whole grain bread, milk, yogurt, or fruit combined with a protein source. Your

protein can come from eggs, cheese, nuts and nut butters, legumes, lean meats or soy products. For example, you could have steel cut oatmeal with walnuts and apple slices or a quesadilla on a whole wheat tortilla with refried beans and cheese or perhaps an omelet with diced vegetables and cheese with fruit on the side.

Remember to also include heart healthy fats as part of your diabetic diet. The best fats come from plant sources and are liquid at room temperature. Examples include olive oil, canola oil, nuts and avocados. Salmon, tuna and flaxseeds are also good sources of omega-3 fatty acids.

Remember to eat mostly plant foods, cut back on refined carbohydrates and sugary beverages and choose healthy fats. As long as you choose your carbohydrates wisely, watch your portion sizes and keep regular meal and snack times, you will be in control of your diabetes and your health.

For more information about this or other nutrition related topics please contact Jennifer Dutton at the St. Clair County Extension office by phone at (205) 338-9416 or email [jld0021@aces.edu](mailto:jld0021@aces.edu).

*Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work in agriculture and home economics, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, and other related acts, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The Alabama Cooperative Extension System (Alabama A&M University and Auburn University) offers educational programs, materials, and equal opportunity employment to all people without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, veteran status, or disability. Visit our website at [www.aces.edu/StClair](http://www.aces.edu/StClair).*