

Control Diabetes for Life

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On the Go Eating with Diabetes

Tic-tock, tic-tock, tic-tock . . . that's the sound of time flying by while you juggle job, family and other commitments while also trying to squeeze in time for relaxation and fun. As you rush from one activity to the next it's often more convenient to grab the nearest quick food to keep your energy level and blood glucose up without considering the effect on your health. It may be faster to grab something from the vending machine or quick mart as you run to your next appointment or activity but are you making the best food choice within your time limitations?

The ever-present time crunch becomes even more significant when you have diabetes. According to research published in the *Journal of the American Board of Family Practice*, an experienced person with Type 2 diabetes who only takes oral medications needs more than two hours a day to follow all of the diabetes self-care recommendations including meal planning, preparation, and exercise. Of this time nearly an hour is focused on food, including meal planning, grocery shopping and meal preparation. It is time-consuming to follow your meal plan during a routine day around the house but how can you maximize your health and nutrition when you are on the go?

Be Prepared

The first step is to be prepared when you face the challenges of a hectic day. If your basic diabetes management skills are already in place you will adapt more easily when your schedule throws you a curveball.

Start your day right by eating before you leave the house. Fruit, whole-grain cereal with skim milk, and low fat yogurt are options that will jumpstart your day and help you feel full making it less likely that you will give in to temptation while you are out and about. To help with the morning rush set the table and check your ingredient supplies each night before you go to bed. Set your coffee maker so that your morning coffee is ready when you

wake up and ready to go out the door with you.

Brush up on your carbohydrate counting so you can be more flexible with your food choices. Knowing the difference between the carbohydrate count of a small order of French fries (about 45 grams) and a small serving of chili (about 23 grams) can help you make a better decision at the drive thru. Resources to help you with carb counts that you might want to keep in the car with you include: *Calorie King Calorie, Fat & Carbohydrate Counter*, by Annan Borushek, and *The Ultimate Calorie, Carb & Fat Gram Counter* by Lea Ann Holzmeister. If you are into technology you



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can also download software that tracks carbohydrates into your PDA or even some insulin pumps.

Have your blood glucose meter handy and use it often during the day so that you are keeping your blood glucose levels within target ranges. This is especially important on those really hectic days. Also have with you an emergency carbohydrate source. Hectic days or increased physical activity can affect your blood sugar level. Be prepared to treat low glucose with a food or drink portion that contains 15 grams of carbohydrate. Examples include 3 to 5 glucose tablets, pieces of hard candy, 4 ounces of (1/2 cup) of fruit juice or regular (non-diet) soda. Caution: When you have a low glucose level be careful to not ingest too much high sugar foods or drinks.

On the Road Dining

Are you one of the 30% of Americans who "dash board dines" -- that is eat in your car at least two times a week? Wiser snack ideas for short trips include: bottled water, fruit, nuts, trail mix, or 100 calorie portion snacks. For longer trips make a meat sandwich on whole wheat bread and prepare a bag of bite size fresh vegetable pieces to snack on. Freeze a bottle of water to go along to keep your lunch cool and then it will be cool to drink later in the day. Also include napkins, pre-moistened towelettes, your favorite sweetener and a trash bag. It is far more relaxed to enjoy an impromptu healthy food picnic than to gulp down a fast food burger and fries in a parking lot. If you do opt for the fast food options keep these hints in mind:

- Avoid "super sized" items and "mega meals". Even though you get more food for less money they are packed with additional calories, as many as 400 calories, on the average. Many times these extra calories can lead to weight gain and associated health care costs. If you do super size the meal share it with others in the car.

- A chicken or fish sandwich is not automatically a healthier choice. Look for grilled meat sandwiches rather than breaded and fried sandwiches. A fried chicken sandwich can be loaded with up to 50% more calories than a plain hamburger.
- Most fast food restaurants now offer salad based options. Choose the grilled chicken salad and low-fat dressing then round out your meal with a piece of fruit from your cooler.
- Be wise with your sides. Many fast food restaurants now offer side dishes other than French fries and potato chips, such as side salads, apples slices and baby carrots.
- Look at your liquids. Plain water and unsweetened (also unflavored) tea or diet soft drinks are good low calorie choices. Even a healthy-sounding smoothie can contain up to 500 calories and 99 grams of carbohydrate.
- Be creative in your sit-down meals choices as well. Split an entrée with someone else, or order a side salad as a starter and make an appetizer your main course. Make special requests by asking for salad dressings and condiments served on the side.

If you are faced with an all-you-can-eat buffet first take a look over all of the options available and then plan out your choices within your carb exchanges. Start your meals with a side salad or broth-based soup. Then use the "plate method" that we talked about last session, to build your meal. Fill half of your plate with non-starchy vegetables such as broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, or green beans. Fill a quarter of the plate with lean meat, chicken or fish and finally fill a quarter of the plate with starchy food such as pasta, rice, bread, tortillas or potatoes. Add a fruit choice, and some low-fat milk and you have put together a quick well rounded meal.

No matter where you eat do not fall victim to restaurant "portion distortion" and oversized servings. Visualize your portion sizes as follows:

- 3 ounces of cooked meat, poultry, or fish is the size of a deck of cards.
- Your thumb is about the same size and volume as 1 tablespoon of salad dressing, mayonnaise, margarine or oil.
- Your clenched fist is about the size of one cup.

When pressed for time you may need to think outside of the box. Supermarkets are another option. The mall food court, an ethnic market, or even a hospital cafeteria, are also dining possibilities when you are out and about. Best choices from a vending machine include: bottle water, 100% fruit juice, skim milk, diet tea or soft drinks, baked chips, dry-roasted nuts, pretzels, dried fruit, nutrition bars, yogurt, and vegetables and dip.

Nutrition bars are crowding the store shelves. Many are no more than a candy bar, repackaged with a healthy twist. When you read the labels carefully they may be an option for those days when you are on the run. Meal replacement bars are designed to replace a 300- to 400-calorie meal and often include 15 grams or more of protein. Snack bars are marketed for eating between meals and are often less than 300 calories. They may be used to replace a meal if they are supplemented with a piece of fruit and serving of skim milk. Carbohydrate controlled bars are for people trying to lose weight and tend to be high in protein 15 to 30 grams and sugar alcohols.

Diabetes bars are intended to either replace a meal, prevent hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) or prevent both hypoglycemia and high blood glucose. Those designed primarily to prevent hypoglycemia often contain uncooked cornstarch, which is absorbed slowly and acts

as a steady source of glucose over several hours. This is particularly helpful for those trying to avoid low blood glucose overnight or before and/or after exercise. Resistant starch and fiber are key ingredients in diabetes bars designed to prevent both hypoglycemia and high blood glucose. Resistant starch and fiber are not broken down into glucose and absorbed into the small intestines so they do not cause an increase in blood glucose and insulin levels after meals (although other ingredients in the bar do). Note the fat source in the nutrition bar. Look for one with 0 grams of trans fat, and avoid those that contain palm kernel oil or partially hydrogenated vegetable oils. Choose a bar with less than 5 grams of total fat and 3 grams of saturated fat.

One final tip: Don't fall victim to the "health halo effect". Researchers have shown that people who eat lunch at a healthy submarine shop tend to eat 111 calories more than those who eat at a fast food burger restaurant. The reason is, people who think they "sacrificed" by eating the healthier meal reward themselves with a special treat such as a cookie, chips or a regular soda drink.

In the Air

Eating right when traveling by air can be challenging but can be overcome with planning. If you are in doubt about what will be available call your airline ahead of time or carry your own snack. Remember that you can't take fluids through security checks. If meals are served you can order a special meal in advance but it must be ordered at least 24 hours in advance and to remind the gate agent of your order when you check in. Good snacks to carry on the airplane with you include: baby carrots, fruit, a small bag of nuts or 100 calorie snack packs. Remember to not eat in the airport just because you are bored. Take a walk instead if you need to kill some time.

In the Office

According to the U.S. Bureau of Statistics, employed persons worked an average of 7.6 hours on the days they worked in 2007. When planning ahead for those times when you must eat while you are at work try to stock your area with healthy foods. If you have access to a refrigerator, freezer and microwave, keep frozen meals, soups, or oatmeal packets available. Bring fresh fruit or a container of salad from home to round out your meal. A desk drawer survival kit containing whole-grain crackers, a jar of peanut butter, dried fruit, and trail mix can make it much easier to resist the call from the vending machine. Packing your lunch at home saves on time, money and calories/carbs. A well-balanced lunch should be rich in fiber and contain carbohydrate as well as lean protein. Build your lunch box by starting with a whole grain pita pocket or bread, add a lean protein source such as

water packet tuna, low fat cheese, or lean meat, and vegetable toppings such as salad greens, thin sliced green pepper strips, sliced cucumbers, and tomatoes. Keep food safety in mind: moist protein food such as meats and eggs are prone to spoilage, so keep your lunch in an insulated bag cooled with an ice pack or refrigerated. Do not put the food in the insulated bag in the refrigerator.

Meals on the Move

Healthy eating on the run is a challenge for people with diabetes. When eating out remember that all of the health conscious options are only helpful if you choose one of them. For most people occasional fast food meals will not upset an otherwise healthy diet and lifestyle. However moderation, as always, is important. Take a tip from those who rely on their food as fuel for performance: be prepared so your healthy eating doesn't hit the skids when you hit the road.

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