

Catering for someone with diabetes

What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a serious, lifelong condition where blood glucose levels become too high. Diabetes affects up to 27% of care home residents¹. There are two main types of diabetes - type 1 and type 2. With type 1 diabetes, the body doesn't produce any insulin at all. Type 2 diabetes happens when the insulin the body makes either doesn't properly or not enough is produced.

The Eatwell Guide

People with diabetes should follow a healthy balanced diet, the same advice given to the rest of the population². There is no need for a special 'diabetic' diet and sugar doesn't have to be avoided. The Eatwell Guide shows the different types of foods and drinks, and in what proportions, to have a healthy, balanced diet³. The proportions shown represent food intake over a period of time (a day or week), not necessarily each meal. The Eatwell Guide divides the foods and drinks you provide for your residents into five main groups. Try to offer a variety of different foods from each of the groups to help them get the wide range of nutrients their body needs to function properly.



Source: PHE (2016) 'Eatwell Guide: An introduction to the Eatwell Guide' (Government); Food & Drink Active; Food Standards Agency; PHE Nutrition team

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Diabetic Food

Since July 2016, manufacturers are not allowed to label food as 'diabetic' or 'suitable for diabetics'⁴. Diabetes UK⁵ have not advised the consumption of these products for years because they offer no benefit to people with diabetes. This is because:

- These foods can be expensive
- They can also be as high in fat and calories as standard products
- They can still raise blood sugar levels
- They contradict general healthy eating advice, which is to eat foods high in sugar and/or fat less often and in small amounts
- Some diabetic foods can have a laxative effect if eaten in excess

Catering tips

- Offer your residents regular meals, snacks and drinks throughout the day. This will help to control their appetite and blood glucose levels
- Base meals on starchy carbohydrates such as bread, rice and potatoes. Include some wholegrain varieties on your menu too such as brown rice, wholegrain bread, wholemeal pasta and leave the skins on potatoes for more fibre
- Don't add any salt during cooking, your residents can add it to their meals if they choose
- Reduce the amount of processed meats (ham, sausages, bacon) on your menu and offer more poultry, fish, eggs, beans and pulses. Processed meats are often high in saturated fat and salt
- Although your residents need some fat in their diet, limit the amount of saturated fat that you offer your residents from foods like butter, cheese, processed meats, cakes and biscuits. Too much saturated fat can increase the risk of heart disease
- Help your residents eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables each day. Serve them as accompaniments at each meal and offer as snacks too. Fresh, frozen, dried, juice and canned (in juice) varieties all towards 5 a day
- Beans, pulses and lentils are a good source of protein, high in fibre, low in fat and can help to control blood glucose and blood fat levels. Try adding kidney beans, chickpeas and lentils to the dishes on your menu cycle
- Have at least 2 portions of oily fish on your menu each week such as salmon, mackerel and sardines. Oily fish contains omega 3 fats which can help protect against heart disease
- Your residents don't have to follow a sugar free diet. Sugar can be used in foods and in baking as part of a healthy diet. Offer your residents small and occasional portions of cakes, desserts and biscuits after a main meal. Look out for sugar free or no added sugar drinks
- Keep your residents hydrated, offer them at least 6-8 drinks each day. They should be available with every meal and regularly in between meals too. Water, milk, no added sugar squash, fruit juice (no more than 150ml) tea and coffee all count towards fluid intake

Further Information

Diabetes UK www.diabetes.org.uk

Diabetic Foods www.diabetes.org.uk/professionals/position-statements-reports/food-nutrition-lifestyle/diabetic-foods

Diabetes UK baking tips www.diabetes.org.uk/guide-to-diabetes/enjoy-food/cooking-for-people-with-diabetes/home-baking-and-diabetes1

Eatwell Guide www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide

References

1. Sinclair AJ, Gadsby R, Penfold S et al (2001) Prevalence of diabetes in care home residents. *Diabetes care* 24 (6) 1066-1068
2. The British Dietetic Association <https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/diabetes-type-1.html>
3. The Eatwell Guide <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-eatwell-guide>
4. European Commission https://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/labelling_nutrition/special_groups_food/diabetics_en
5. Diabetes UK, <https://www.diabetes.org.uk/professionals/position-statements-reports/food-nutrition-lifestyle/diabetic-foods>

