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1. Food and Nutrition

1.1. *Healthy Eating*

For a person with diabetes to remain healthy, one of the most important things is to keep the blood glucose level as near to normal as possible.

This can be achieved by following a healthy eating plan, undertaking regular physical activity / exercise and taking insulin and/or tablets if required.

Many overweight people who develop diabetes in middle age may be able to improve control of their blood glucose level by reducing their weight.

From time to time you may need alterations to your eating plan, therefore it is important to have regular reviews with your doctor, dietitian and diabetes educator.

The basis of traditional food habits for different cultures is suitable for people with diabetes as they are based on plenty of whole grains, vegetables, fruit and nuts, sea food and only small amounts of meat and meat products.

It is low in saturated fat, moderate in protein, and high in carbohydrate. It does not need to be sugar free, but concentrated sources like soft drinks, cordials, lollies and other sweets should be limited. The use of processed and convenience food is limited and so maintaining traditional food habits can help manage diabetes.

When people migrate to Australia, they are faced with many new foods and Western food habits. Many people adopt a combination of traditional and Western food habits.

This often means an increase in meat and meat products, processed and convenience foods and high fat/sugar snack foods. These changes in food habits can lead to health problems.

For people with diabetes, it is best to combine the best food choices from both traditional and Western food habits to help manage their diabetes.

A good eating pattern for a person with diabetes will:

- Contain mostly high fibre carbohydrate foods – wholegrain cereals and bread, vegetables and fruit
- Be low in saturated fat
- Provide adequate protein for good health

Diabetes and your diet

Healthy eating helps control blood glucose levels

Choose

- Mainly carbohydrates (for example, wholegrain breads, pasta, rice (eg Basmati or Doongara), legumes, vegetables and fruit)
- Be moderate in protein intake (for example, lean meat, skinless chicken, fish and eggs)
- Select foods high in fibre (for example, wholegrain bread, fruit and vegetables)

Avoid

- Saturated fats (for example, meat fat, butter, cream, cheese, cooking margarine, palm oil, copha, coconut milk/cream, processed snacks and take-away foods)
- Foods very high in sugar (for example, soft drinks, cordials, sweets, lollies, and other sweets)
- Learn which foods contain carbohydrates, proteins and fats.

Know the energy values of foods so that wherever you are you can make wise meal choices.

Ask your dietitian to help you review your nutrition needs and to explain aids such as the glycaemic index (fast and slow release) and carbohydrate exchange systems which may assist in your diabetes control.

Limit your fat and oil intake.

Learn to differentiate between good fats (poly and mono-unsaturated) and bad fats (saturated).

Learn to correctly interpret the nutrition information panels on food products.