



FACT SHEET:

The glycemic index

Choosing the right amount and type of carbohydrate (carb) foods can help you to manage your blood glucose levels. The glycemic index (GI) is one tool that can help you choose which carb foods to eat.

Carb foods are the main source of energy for your body. Foods that are high in carbs include bread, pasta, rice, grains, cereals, fruits, starchy vegetables, legumes, milk and yoghurt. Your body breaks down carbs into glucose. The glucose then enters your bloodstream and is used by the body's cells for energy.

What is the GI?

The GI ranks how quickly or slowly carb foods affect blood glucose levels.

High-GI foods break down into glucose quickly. This means a higher and faster rise in blood glucose levels after eating.

Low-GI foods break down into glucose over a longer period when compared with high-GI foods. This means a smaller and slower rise in blood glucose levels after eating.

What are the benefits of a low-GI eating plan?

Research shows people with diabetes improved their fasting and after-meals blood glucose levels and lower their average blood glucose levels (HbA1c) by including lower GI carb foods as part

of a healthy eating plan. Low GI eating plans can also help with weight management.

Are all low-GI foods healthy?

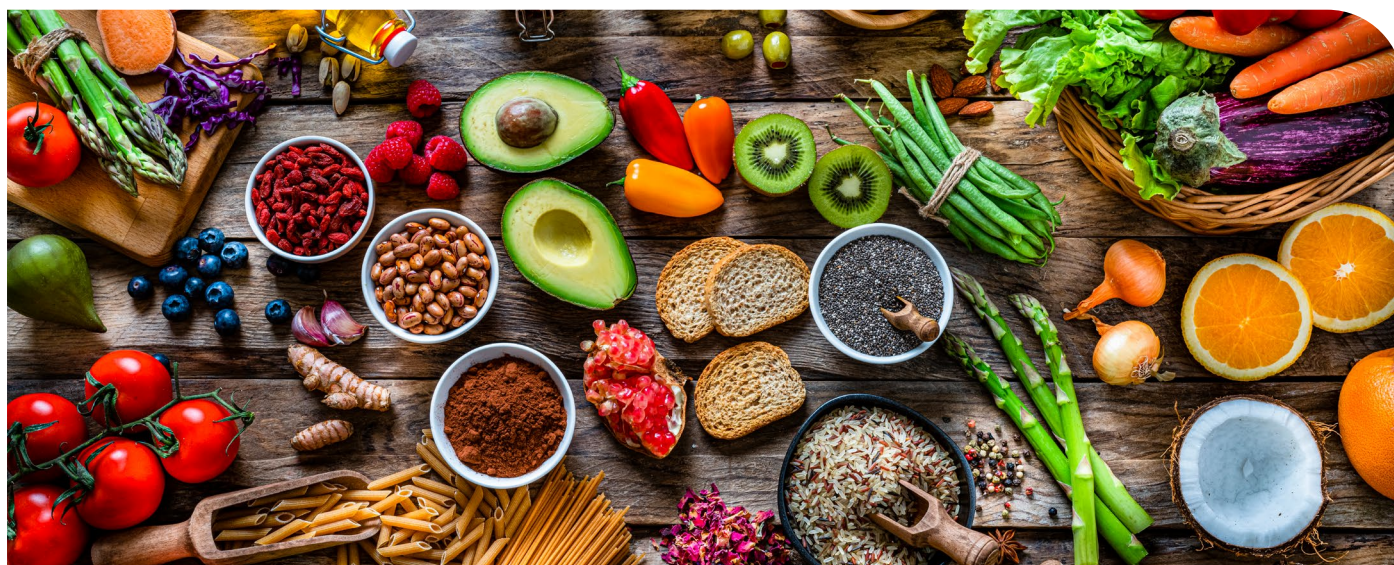
Some foods with a low GI are not everyday food choices. Carbs that contain a lot of added saturated fat will take longer to breakdown and are not necessarily a healthy option. Examples are potato chips, chocolate, and ice cream.

When choosing low-GI foods, it is essential to also consider the overall nutritional value of the food, including the number of kilojoules and amount of saturated fat, salt (sodium) and fibre. Foods that meet both low GI and health recommendations can be certified by a low GI symbol.

It is important to remember that the GI is just one tool to help you manage your diabetes. You also need to consider the total amount of carb in the foods you eat throughout the day. Just because a carb is low-GI, it does not mean you can eat a lot. Serving sizes are still really important.

Examples of lower GI foods

Breads	Low-GI varieties include dense grainy/seeded breads, pumpernickel, authentic sourdough and white corn tortillas. Look for breads with the GI symbol.
Breakfast cereals	Low-GI varieties include traditional rolled oats or steel-cut oats, wheat, rice or oat bran and natural muesli. Look for cereals with the GI symbol.
Grains	Grains include pasta (most types), fresh rice noodles, soba noodles, mung bean (bean thread noodles), Basmati rice, Doongara™ rice, quinoa, barley, bulgur (cracked wheat), buckwheat, pearl (Israeli) couscous and freekeh.
Legumes	Other than broad beans, all dried and canned legumes have a low GI. Examples include baked beans, kidney beans, soybeans, mixed beans, cannellini beans, haricot beans, butter beans, brown/green/red lentils, split peas, black eyed peas and chickpeas.
Starchy vegetables	Relatively low-GI vegetables include taros, parsnips, sweetcorn and orange sweet potatoes. There are also some lower GI varieties of white potatoes – look for the low GI symbol.
Dairy foods	Milk, soy milk, yoghurt and custard naturally have a low GI. Look for low-fat, unsweetened varieties.
Biscuits and crackers	Lower GI varieties include grainy/seeded crackers and biscuits with oats and dried fruit. Look for varieties with the GI symbol.
Fruit	Most fruits have a low GI, including apples, bananas, pears, oranges, peaches, apricots, plums, mangoes, nectarines, grapes, kiwifruit and prunes. The GI of some fruits, such as bananas and mango, increases as they ripen.





More information and support

- Go to ndss.com.au to search for the 'Making healthy food choices', 'Hints for healthy cooking', 'Carbohydrate counting', 'Understanding food labels' and other fact sheets.
- Go to ndss.com.au to access the Carb Counting program online and other NDSS programs and services in your state or territory, or online.
- Go to dietitiansaustralia.org.au to find a dietitian or call Dietitians Australia on **1800 812 942**.
- For more information about the glycemic index, go to glycemicindex.com and gisymbol.com



Top tips

- The GI is one tool to help you choose which carb foods to eat.
- Try to include a nutritious low-GI food at each meal.
- Replace high-GI carb foods for nutritious lower GI options. A dietitian can help you with this.
- Replace some high-GI foods in a meal with low-GI options to lower the overall GI of the meal. Speak to a dietitian about how to lower the overall GI of your meals.
- Look for products with the GI symbol logo. This means that the food has been tested at an accredited laboratory and meets strict nutrient criteria that are in line with the Dietary Guidelines for Australians. Not all foods with a low GI will have the GI symbol logo.

Notes

The NDSS and you

Whether you have just been diagnosed with diabetes, or have been living with diabetes for a while, the NDSS provides a range of support services, information, and subsidised products to help you manage your diabetes, stay healthy and live well. For access to more resources (including translated versions), or to find out more about support services, go to ndss.com.au or call the NDSS Helpline on **1800 637 700**.

This information is intended as a guide only. It should not replace individual medical advice and if you have any concerns about your health or further questions, you should contact your health professional.