

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (AND ANSWERS)

Do I need to cut out ALL sugar?

No. Minimising intake of sugar, jam, honey, syrups is a good idea but you don't need to cut it out completely. Avoid sugar sweetened drinks and sweets as these will spike blood glucose. In my experience, some people overly focus on sugar and miss the bigger picture of weight loss, exercise, a healthy, balanced diet, good sleep, stress reduction, etc. Sugar free chocolates, biscuits and 'diabetic jams' are NOT advised. They often still contain high GI carbs so would still spike blood glucose. Best to go for small amounts of normal options and reduce frequency.

Do I need to cut out carbs?

- Cutting out ALL carbohydrates would not be safe as the brain needs some glucose.
- Ketogenic diet = 20g – 50g carbohydrates per day. A keto diet is only recommended clinically for children with epilepsy (NICE guidelines NG217). There are long term safety concerns of following a keto diet for helping weight loss and/or glycaemia (increased risk of poor kidney, heart and bone health and increased risk of hypoglycaemia for those on insulin due to very low glycogen stores).
- Low carb diet = 50g – 130g per day. Can lead to improvements in HbA1c, triglycerides and weight loss. Can be followed safely. Evidence shows most effective in short term only (6 months), could be due to difficulty in maintaining changes long term.
- Low/Moderate carb diet = 130g – 250g per day. Can be easier to maintain this level of intake. Can be followed safely and lead to improvements in weight and HbA1c.

Type of carbohydrates is important. Opt for high fibre options: granary, rye or sourdough bread, basmati rice, bulgur wheat, pearl barley, quinoa, new potatoes, sweet potatoes, bran or oat based cereals, pasta.

Combining carbs with a source of lean protein and/or vegetables will significantly help to reduce the GI (e.g. toast with small amount of peanut butter or boiled egg and sliced tomato is better than just margarine)

Are sweeteners OK?

Well conducted and large studies say they are safe and should not adversely impact diabetes. Likely to be better than full sugar versions of drinks for teeth, weight, diabetes and general health. There are smaller studies (some of these not well conducted) that do show minimal benefit in swapping to sweeteners and some even show an adverse impact to health. WHO advise not to use sweeteners for weight management (2023). I explain this to patients and leave it to them to decide. Plant-based sweeteners (e.g. Stevia) may be a better option than others as less safety concerns.

Is intermittent fasting a good option?

Can be done safely. Can work for some people, depends if able to stick to the plan. Need to ensure the diet is still nutritionally adequate so best to speak with a dietitian or follow a plan from a reputable source (e.g. <https://diabetesmyway.nhs.uk/keeping-healthy/different-dietary-approaches-for-weight-loss/intermittent-fasting/>). For those on insulin, will likely need dose adjustment or regimen change.

Is it OK to skip breakfast?

Yes. There are some systematic reviews that show breakfast **skipping** is associated with **weight gain** (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orcp.2019.12.002>) BUT others that show that **adding** in breakfast can lead to **weight gain** (<https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.l42>). Individual choice, overall balance of diet in the day is key. If somebody is having mixed insulin in the morning or bolus then they should have breakfast with a carbohydrate source or change insulin regimen.

Can I lose weight through exercise alone?

Not likely. The body uses mechanisms to counter energy expenditure through physical activity, therefore, combination of diet and activity needed for most people.

What's the best way to lose weight?

Achieving a daily calorie deficit of 500-1000 kcals per day through healthy diet changes and increased activity. There are many options and what works for one may not work for another. Doing something you can sustain long term is the most important thing. Most diets fail because people cannot sustain them. Meal replacement shakes can be effective (Oviva) and group weight loss programmes (tier 2 via community services or commercial providers – Slimming World or WW).

What's the best diet for diabetes?

A healthy, balanced diet as described by Public Health England in their Eatwell Guide. There is no 'diabetic diet'. Having said that, it makes sense to focus on weight loss if needed + moderating carbohydrate intake, low GI carbohydrates as part of balanced meals (i.e. plenty of vegetables and some lean protein), reduce intake of refined carbohydrates and sugar. A good quick rule for meals is to AIM for half plate vegetables, quarter carbs and quarter protein (if trying to lose weight)
OR equal proportions of each, if weight loss not priority.

What are some healthy snacks I can have?

Small pot of low-sugar or unsweetened yoghurt, 20-30g unsalted nuts, 4 squares dark chocolate, portion of fruit (80g; amount that fits in a cupped hand), vegetable sticks and hummus. For those on insulin, we advise sticking to snacks that have 15g carbohydrates or less.

How can I make diet changes that are affordable?

Frozen vegetables and berries, buy in bulk when there are offers and batch cook, tinned beans and lentils, tinned fish

SIGPOSTING

Eatwell Guide: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-guidelines-and-food-labels/the-eatwell-guide/>

Diabetes UK: <https://www.diabetes.org.uk/guide-to-diabetes/enjoy-food/eating-with-diabetes>

British Dietetic Association: <https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/diabetes-type-2.html>
<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/diabetes-type-1.html>

British Nutrition Foundation: <https://www.nutrition.org.uk/health-conditions/type-2-diabetes/>