

Nutrition for Life: Food Groups and Portion Sizes

Understanding how food groups work together and how much to eat can help you work toward your goals and be healthier. Your best options will always be foods that are lower in saturated fat, added sugar, and sodium.



Non-starchy vegetables are full of nutrients and have little impact on blood glucose (also called blood sugar).

- They are low in calories, but high in fiber and water content to help you feel satisfied after meals, so feel free to eat them liberally.
 - The best choices are fresh, frozen, and canned vegetables without added salt, fat, or sugar.
 - Examples include asparagus, green beans, carrots, cabbage, broccoli, mushrooms, cactus (nopal), bok choy, spinach, and other leafy greens.



Protein helps you manage your blood glucose and weight.

- Limit fatty cuts of meat, like chicken and turkey skin, cheese, and processed meats like bacon and sausage.
- Choose fish and other seafood, lean meats, eggs, cottage cheese, and plant-based protein sources.
- Some plant-based proteins contain carbohydrates and can impact blood glucose. Beans and lentils have both protein and carbohydrates, but they are a heart-healthy choice because they are high in fiber. Soy products are usually low in carbohydrates.
- Peanut butter and other nut and seed butters also provide protein.



Carbohydrates like bread, pastas, cereals, and rice have the greatest impact on blood glucose.

- Starchy vegetables include potatoes, sweet potatoes, acorn squash, butternut squash, pumpkin, plantain, and corn.
- Fruit contains fiber and vitamins and is also a carbohydrate that raises blood glucose.
- The best sources of fruit are fresh with the skin on, frozen without added sugar, and canned packed in 100% fruit juice or water.
- The best choices for starches are whole grain foods, beans, peas, and lentils without added fats, sugar, or sodium.
- Choose breads, cereal, and other products with whole grain ingredients like whole wheat and oats.
- Choose cereals with at least 5 grams of fiber and less than 5 grams of added sugar per serving.

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Fats

- Fat does not have a big impact on blood glucose. Although high in calories, fat helps to absorb certain nutrients and provide a feeling of fullness.
- The best choices are unsaturated fats, which support heart health. These include avocado, olives, nuts, seeds, salad dressings, and mayonnaise. The best choices for oil are olive, sunflower, safflower, and canola.



Dairy

- Dairy is a source of carbohydrate that raises blood glucose. Dairy foods also contain protein, calcium, and vitamin D.
- Dairy foods include cow's milk, soy milk, and yogurt.
- Some dairy alternatives, like almond or oat milk, contain carbohydrates and very little protein. Look for unsweetened varieties and check the nutrition facts label.
- The best options for dairy foods are low-fat milk, and plain, low-fat Greek yogurt.



Fun foods and extras

- Eat foods that are low in nutrition and high in calories in moderation.
- Fit in desserts by making your meal low in fat and rich in greens. If your meals are lean protein and non-starchy vegetables, your meal will be naturally low in carbohydrates and calories. This gives you room for something extra to enjoy.
- Some examples are:
 - 1/2 cup ice cream
 - One pancake or waffle the size of a compact disc with a tiny drizzle of maple syrup
 - A small cake, brownie, or slice of cake about half the size of a business card



ICE CREAM



PANCAKE



BROWNIE AND CAKES

ONE SERVING

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