



Take Control, Take Charge!

'You have diabetes', and just like that, you feel like the world around you has come crashing down. As the feeling of disbelief sets in, you find yourself in denial and asking, "Why Me?"

Being diagnosed with diabetes may feel like a burden. It often manifests as an emotional weight, which in some cases can lead to depression and anxiety. The key to living with diabetes is balance.

According to Mary Easaw, Chief Dietitian at the National Heart Institute (IJN), the key to living a balanced healthy lifestyle with diabetes is 'knowledge, self-discipline, and multidisciplinary support'. The person must be empowered to self-manage the condition, which means having an understanding of diabetes, how the condition needs to be treated and what steps should be taken to ensure that blood sugar levels are always kept within the recommended range.

Good diabetes management has been shown to reduce the risk of developing complications, enhance quality of life and reduce hospital admissions among people with the condition¹.



Take Control: Get Active

Living with diabetes and being overweight or obese significantly increases your risk of health complications. Losing just 5-10% body weight through a combination of exercise, choosing the right food, and managing your portion size will help you shed those extra pounds and keep diabetes in check².

As a rule of thumb, aim to get at least 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous intense aerobic exercise at least 5 days a week². If this sounds all too strenuous, make every effort to get outdoors for a brisk walk or alternatively jump on the treadmill to get your heart pumping as often as you can. Every little bit helps. It's proven that regular physical activity not only improves your body's sensitivity to insulin but helps manage your blood sugar level³.

Take Charge of What You Eat

It can be challenging to determine your daily food plan, especially when there isn't a 'one-size-fits-all' plan⁴. As such, the key is controlling the amount of carbohydrates consumed.

One method of controlling your carbohydrate intake is using the 'plate method'⁵. Take your dinner plate and allocate one half to non-starchy fruits and vegetables, one-quarter to lean proteins such as fish, and chicken, and the final quarter to slow digesting carbohydrates such as brown rice. The 'plate method', can be easily replicated when you are eating out with friends and family to curb temptation and the urge to overindulge. Remember, always be mindful of what you are eating and take the time to chew your food.

"A person with diabetes should watch what they eat, but that doesn't mean going on a crazy diet plan and cutting out carbs and sugar altogether. Always consult with your dietitian and diabetes educator to find out what foods are

suitable, and how much energy your body needs according to your medication. Avoid foods that contain trans fat, refined sugar and have a high glycemic index measurement as these will cause blood sugar surges. If you are easily tempted, then avoid buffets as they are a waste of money, and only show up on your waistline,” Easaw exclaimed.

When you have diabetes, it is important to eat three or more meals a day, within your meal plan including breakfast, ideally at the same time every day to ensure a steady blood sugar level⁶. However, due to our busy lifestyles, many find it challenging to eat on schedule. This is where a meal replacement can support your daily food plan. Meal replacement products (MRPs) provide a meal or healthy snack alternative for people with diabetes. They may help to stabilise blood sugar levels and also assist with weight loss⁷.

A specialised diabetes nutritional beverage that supports you in managing your blood sugar level should contain whey protein, 100% soluble fibre, and slow digesting complex carbohydrates. It should also have a low GI measurement, and meet the latest recommendations as suggested by the American Diabetes Association.

Whey protein, an essential ingredient found in a specialised diabetes nutritional beverage is widely known for its high protein content that effectively reduces blood sugar surges after meals compared to other protein sources such as eggs, soy or tuna⁸. Whey protein essentially helps release specific types of hormones in your body, GLP-1 and GIP, to stimulate insulin after a meal. Taken over a period of time, whey protein even helps to reduce your HbA1c, i.e. glycated haemoglobin⁸.



Fibre is also beneficial due to its role in decreasing blood sugar and lipid levels⁹. Most complex carbohydrate foods contain fibre, and generally take longer to digest. Due to its slow-releasing nature, complex carbohydrate, have less of an immediate impact on blood sugar, and therefore help improve glycemic response and regulate blood sugar¹⁰.

Easaw recommends keeping a food journal in which you record for two to three days the food, drinks, and snacks you consume each day as best practice. It should contain dates, times, blood sugar readings, medications, food eaten, and your level of physical activity. Use a small notebook, daily planner, or smart phone app to record this information. Bring this record when you see your doctor and dietitian at the hospital.

This food journal will help you identify the patterns and trends associated with your daily meal planning. Ultimately, it serves as a tool to help you and your dietitian design a comprehensive plan that includes food you enjoy while guiding your decisions for better blood sugar control.

Managing diabetes also entails managing stress. According to Easaw, stress can have a negative impact resulting in a person with diabetes over or under eating as a coping mechanism. This in turn causes a dangerous blood sugar spike. “If you cannot stand your job and find that it affects your health, then find another one. Don’t let stress eat you up.”

Take Charge With A Team

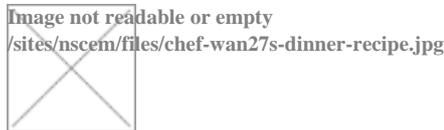
Managing diabetes can be made easier with the right medical knowledge and support. Easaw emphasises the importance of having this support in the form of a multidisciplinary team to help a person with diabetes stay on track. “The moment someone has been diagnosed with diabetes, they must seek help from an endocrinologist, a dietitian, and a diabetes educator. This multidisciplinary team approach is critical to successful diabetes care,” she remarked.

Ultimately, the person who matters most is yourself. Take charge and set course to listen to your body by making educated informed decisions. Avoid unnecessary blood sugar surges by living a healthier lifestyle for you and your family. As the saying goes, *Your Health is In Your Hands*.

The writer does not endorse any products and this article is solely for education purpose.

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