



Senior SMART choices

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UNIVERSITY of NEW HAMPSHIRE
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Nutrition Connections:

A Link to Food, Fitness & Financial Health for Seniors

Spring 2008



The “Diabesity” Challenge

The epidemic of overweight and obese Americans has fueled a five-fold increase in type 2 diabetes since the 1960’s. No wonder diabetes is often called “diabesity.” Moreover, low-income adults (especially women) are twice as likely to be diabetic than higher-income adults.

What causes diabetes?

Type 1: (about five percent of total diabetes cases) is an auto-immune disorder (likely triggered by a virus) that destroys the pancreas’ insulin-making cells. Daily insulin injections are needed.

Type 2: (about 90 percent of total cases) arises from a combo of genetics, poor diet, lack of exercise and weight gain (especially an “apple shape”). They all reduce insulin’s ability to shepherd blood sugar (glucose) into body cells for energy or storage and to prevent high blood sugar. The pancreas steps up insulin production to compensate but then starts to wear out, mainly from overwork and a genetic weakness. Insulin output begins falling and blood sugar rises, leading first to pre-diabetes (affecting 18 percent of Americans) and often to full-blown diabetes.

Type 2 diabetes can be well managed (though not cured) through regular exercise, healthy eating

and weight control, along with the common use of oral medications and sometimes insulin.

What’s the best diet for diabetes? Let’s look at five common diabetes nutrition myths:

Myth 1: A special diabetic diet is needed.

Wrong. The healthy food choices for diabetes are basically the same ones that help control weight and lower the risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, cancer, and osteoporosis—and of developing diabetes in the first place. Special “diabetic foods” aren’t needed. And that’s great news, because poorly-managed diabetes more than doubles the risk of heart disease and stroke which actually cause over two out of three diabetic deaths. Plus, some 90 percent of Type 2 diabetics are overweight or obese, and about 60 percent have high blood pressure.

In a nutshell, healthy eating for diabetes, weight control and overall disease protection means:

- Focus on whole grains, fruits (go easy on juice), non-starchy veggies, beans, low-fat dairy foods, and nuts, and go lean for protein (baked or broiled

- fish, very lean meats/poultry, and soy foods). Go easy on sodium.
- Pay extra attention to portion size for meals and snacks to help control weight and after-meal blood sugar.
- And don't forget regular exercise! It greatly improves carbohydrate tolerance and blood-sugar control, aside from its many other health benefits.
- In addition, most diabetics should use a carbohydrate counting method to help stay within recommended carbohydrate limits per meal and per day.

Myth 2: Avoid all sugar. Wrong. Even a no-sugar diet won't correct high blood sugar, since both sugars and starches are digested into glucose, the main fuel for the body and brain. Experts recommend tracking total daily carbohydrate intake rather than sugar.

The best way to handle sugar (diabetes or not): cut back on calorie-rich but nutrient-poor foods high in added sugar. Some, like donuts and snack cakes, are also high in heart-risky saturated and trans fat.

Myth #3: Don't eat fruit, because it's too high in sugar. Wrong. Most whole fruits have a modest effect on blood sugar if portion size is reasonable, because their sugars are more slowly released and absorbed. Bananas, raisins and fruit juices require the most portion control.

What about vegetables? Most are low in carbohydrates, except for potatoes, sweet potatoes, and corn which need more portion control.

Myth 4: Eat as few carbohydrates as possible. Wrong again. The health benefits of "good" carbohydrates like whole grains, fruits, vegetables and beans are just too vital to pass up. In fact, they're the richest source of fiber, vitamins, minerals and antioxidants that help protect against heart disease, stroke, cancer, and even Alzheimer's disease. The goal is to eat more healthy carbohydrates and fewer, less-healthy carbohydrates. Diabetics can still keep blood sugar under control through wise carbohydrates choices, portion control, regular exercise, weight control, and the likely use of diabetes medications, possibly including insulin.

Myth 5: Read labels for carbohydrates at the supermarket (or food pantry). A diabetic's real food-gathering mission is to acquire more healthy carbohydrates sources and fewer less-healthy ones

by reading labels for fiber, sugar, sodium, and heart-risky saturated and trans fat. Judging foods by their carbohydrate grams per serving isn't very helpful for two reasons:

- Some higher-carbohydrates foods like oatmeal, whole-wheat bread, brown rice and beans are very disease protective.
- Nutrition Facts serving size weights (in grams or ounces) vary a lot among similar foods, even though serving volume (in cups) may be the same. For example, a one-cup serving of breakfast cereal weighs anywhere from 14 g (puffed rice cereal) to 49 g (shredded wheat cereal). That's more than a three-fold difference in food weight as well as in carbohydrate and calorie content, so it would be a mistake to choose refined-grain puffed rice cereal over whole-grain shredded wheat cereal based on carbohydrate and calorie content per cup.



Pucker Up! It's Rhubarb Season!

One of the first signs of spring in New England, rhubarb starts appearing in April in most regions. Rhubarb has a unique tartness with a fruity after taste that makes it a favorite for use in pies and other desserts. Soon to be abundant, this perennial is commonly mistaken for a fruit, but it is actually a vegetable.

Choosing and Using Rhubarb

Rhubarb can be found in most supermarkets and at most farmers markets from May through June.

Some tips for choosing and using rhubarb:

- Select firm, crisp and brightly colored stalks.
- Be sure to trim the stems and remove and discard the leaves when arriving home. (The leaves are toxic and should never be eaten!)
- Look for stalks no more than an inch in width.
- Choose deeply red colored stalks (for antioxidant properties). Store whole stalks, trimmed stalks in a plastic bag in the refrigerator for up to two weeks.
- Rhubarb can be easily frozen both raw and cooked, and is popularly canned in jams, jellies and chutney.

Try the Chicken Smothered in Rhubarb Sauce recipe in this newsletter for a real taste treat!



Seasonal Foods Quiz

Quiz

questions:

- 1.** All of the following are great reasons to buy local foods EXCEPT:
a) Buying local helps support the local economy.
b) Buying local reduces fuel use and is better for the environment.
c) Local fresh fruits and vegetables are healthy choices.
d) There are no fresh, local foods available in spring in New Hampshire.
- 2.** What fresh fruit is available year-round in New Hampshire?
a) Pears, b) Apples, c) Strawberries, d) or Melons
- 3.** **True or false:** Fresh asparagus, while delicious, provides little nutritional benefit.
- 4.** A local food, considered a delicacy, available from early spring into early summer is:
a) Saskatoons, b) Asian pears, c) Fiddleheads, d) or Kale
- 5.** **True or false:** You need a map, a global positioning system and galoshes to find local foods in New Hampshire in the spring.

answers:

- 1. D.** Available fresh local vegetables in May include artichokes, asparagus and rhubarb, as well as greens and fresh herbs. There are also many other locally-produced foods such as cheese, breads and pasta, available year-round!
- 2. B.** Fresh apples, when stored properly in a cool, dark place, can be bought year round without losing much nutritional value. Apples in New Hampshire are grown locally throughout the state, as well in Massachusetts and New York.
- 3. False.** Asparagus is a nutritional powerhouse loaded with fiber, Vitamins C and K, as well as folate. It is also very low in calories at only 43 calories per cup!
- 4. C.** Fiddleheads are available in New Hampshire from April until June. Fiddleheads are the young, coiled fern leaves of the ostrich fern. It is important to cook fiddleheads in boiling water for 10 minutes, or steam for 20 minutes, to reduce the risk of food-borne illness. The taste of fiddleheads has been described as similar to asparagus, green beans, artichokes and mushrooms, or a combination of them!
- 5. False.** Most markets throughout the state carry local foods. If you have trouble locating items in your market, ask the store manager. Additionally, local farmers' markets, as well as community-supported agriculture, are a great way to get fresh foods while getting to know your farmer!

Check out the location of local farmers' markets at:
<http://lightenupnh.org/FoodNutri/main.cfm>



Chicken Smothered in Rhubarb Sauce

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|--------------------------------------|--|
| 2 Boneless, skinless chicken breasts | 1 Small onion, cut into ¼" strips (or julienned) |
| 1 Tablespoon all-purpose flour | 1 Clove garlic, minced |
| 1 Pinch each salt and black pepper | 1 Whole bay leaf |
| ¼ Pound fresh rhubarb cut in ½" dice | ¼ Teaspoon thyme leaves, dried |
| 2 Tablespoons olive or canola oil | ¼ Cup chicken stock |

- Combine flour, salt and pepper on a small plate. Dredge chicken breast in mixture.
- Heat oil in frying pan, brown chicken on both sides (2 or 3 minutes).
- Add rhubarb and onions, stirring constantly until onions are wilted and browned (about 10 minutes).
- Add garlic, herbs and white wine or chicken stock, cover and reduce heat.
- Stir occasionally, 15-20 minutes, or until chicken is cooked through.
- Season further, to taste, before serving.

Adapted from The Food Network, Emeril Lagasse.

Nutrition information per serving:

1 serving (3 oz chicken with ½ cup sauce)

Calories – 270,

Fat – 15 grams (2 grams saturated),

Protein – 17 grams,

Carbohydrate – 13 grams,

Fiber – 3 grams,

Sodium – 115 milligrams, and

Cholesterol – 39 milligrams.



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