



Don't desert dessert



Diabetes can affect people's nutrition and hydration as they age. The simple steps below will help ensure a healthy diet without sacrificing the occasional treat.

By Samantha Ling

As we get older, staying nourished and maintaining healthy eating habits can be challenging. Our lifestyle, appetite, ability to chew or swallow and sometimes even our access to nourishing foods may change, influencing our intake.

Living with diabetes is an added complication, but it does not mean an end to desserts, cakes, biscuits and other discretionary food items.

Optimising nutritional status should be at the forefront of healthcare for all ageing Australians. With malnutrition and frailty affecting 40 per cent of elderly Australians on admission to hospital, and nearly 10 per cent of those in the community living with chronic diseases, the additional dietary restrictions related to diabetes may amplify poor intake and dehydration.

ENJOY A VARIETY OF FOODS

We often experience changes to our sense of smell and taste as we age. Food therefore needs to be flavoursome and enjoyable.

To assist in managing blood glucose levels, a regular intake of carbohydrates with meals and snacks is important.

- Try to provide nourishing foods like:
- Wholemeal or multigrain breads
 - High-fibre breakfast cereals like oats
 - Fibrous fruits like bananas, apples and oranges
 - Vegetables like potato or corn
 - Dairy products like yoghurt and milk.

The occasional consumption of discretionary foods such as cakes will not impact on the long-term management of diabetes. For those who are undernourished, a slice of fruit cake as a snack can contribute an important serving of fibre, fats, protein and

many vitamins and minerals.

If low energy is a problem, try swapping the main meal to the middle of the day when energy levels and hunger are higher. Smaller, more frequent meals may be more appetising than larger meals. For those living independently, cooking meals in large batches and freezing them may save time and effort across the week. Alternatively, alternating meal preparation with friends and family can ease the load, as can meal delivery services.

LOW GLYCAEMIC INDEX OPTIONS

Low glycaemic index foods break down slower, which helps to stabilise blood glucose levels. Including at least one low glycaemic item at a meal can assist with overall blood glucose control. For example, combining boiled sweet potato (low GI) with regular boiled potato (high GI). For more information on the glycaemic index, go to www.glycemicindex.com

STAY HYDRATED

As we age, it is natural to lose our sense of thirst. However, drinking adequate amounts of fluids is still important. Hydration is essential for good health. It assists in bowel

regularity, the prevention of urinary tract infections, blood pressure control, healthy kidney function and energy levels.

The best form of hydration is water. However, hydrating fluids can also include milk, soups and, less often, juice and cordial, due to their high-sugar and low-protein content. For those who are undernourished, juice and cordial can be a part of a balanced diet, even with diabetes. Consuming juice or cordial with a meal, rather than on its own, will help overall blood glucose control.

Fluid requirements will vary depending on the weather, age, activity levels and health. Generally, females should aim for 6–8 cups of hydrating fluids every day, and men, 8–10 cups. Encourage drinking a few sips regularly and in response to thirst or a dry mouth.

Alcohol intake should be limited to no more than two standard drinks a day and consumed with meals rather than on an empty stomach. Alcohol can affect balance, blood glucose control and interact with medications.

KEEP MOVING

Exercise is not only important for naturally lowering blood glucose levels, it also maintains good muscle strength for everyday tasks and strong bones. At least 30 minutes of movement every day is recommended.

MAINTAIN A HEALTHY WEIGHT

Fluctuations in weight indicate that either too much or not enough food is being consumed. An ideal weight is one that allows free movement without pain. Some people like to use their height and weight as a reference range for what their weight should be, known as the body mass index (BMI). If you would like to know more about your ideal weight, seek the advice of an Accredited Practising Dietitian.

ADJUSTING MEDICATIONS VS FOOD

It may be preferable to adjust medications to assist in the management of blood glucose control rather than to implement dietary restrictions.

The elderly often don't eat enough to meet their nutritional requirements and, for many, getting them to eat sufficiently is the challenge. ■

An Accredited Practising Dietitian can tailor an eating plan to benefit individual needs and also assist residential care facilities to develop menus that meet requirements for all residents. To find an APD in your area, visit the DAA website www.daa.asn.au and look under 'Find an Accredited Practising Dietitian'.

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