



Blood glucose levels and your health

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July 2025

At the heart of diabetes self-management is maintaining [consistent blood glucose levels](#). Yet, it can be one of the hardest things to do. The shelves of our supermarkets are packed with processed foods that promise quick and tasty satisfaction through carbs and sugar. But if you're choosing the right foods, exercising regularly, staying hydrated and sleeping well, you'll be much better prepared to properly manage your blood glucose.* In addition to working closely with your doctor, here are a few tips on how to do it.

A basic glucose primer

Our bodies turn food into glucose, which is then stored in the cells that provide us with energy. If you have type 1 diabetes, your pancreas doesn't produce insulin. And if you have type 2 diabetes, your body becomes insulin resistant, meaning it is no longer able to efficiently use the glucose that you produce. In the first case, artificial insulin is necessary; the second can be managed with diet and exercise and non-insulin medication, although additional insulin may be needed. In both cases, it's best to avoid blood glucose lows (hypoglycemia) and highs (hyperglycemia) whenever possible.

It all begins with food

It's important to know how [different foods affect your glucose levels](#). The following are a [few basic tips](#).

Track your carbs. Carbohydrates—pasta, rice, bread—break down into sugar, which enters the blood stream almost as soon as the food is digested (in as little as 15 minutes). You don't need to avoid carbs entirely, but there are ways to offset

their effect. Protein (chicken, fish, lean meats, eggs, cheese, beans) holds back the sugar produced by carbs, forcing it to release more slowly into the blood stream, so that your glucose levels remain more stable. When you eat carbs, eat an equal sized amount of protein. For instance, have a chicken breast along with a baked potato for dinner.



Some foods can help manage glucose. Certain foods help control blood glucose such as whole grains; non-starchy vegetables that are high in fiber, like broccoli, carrots and leafy greens; healthy fats like avocados, nuts and seeds; and berries. However, it's important to note that whole grains are still carbs and berries have natural sugars, so they can make your blood sugar spike if you eat too much.

Drink water! When it comes to your blood glucose, it's essential to [keep hydrated](#). Water helps your kidneys flush out excess sugar. The American Diabetes Association (ADA) recommends starting your day with a full glass of water before eating or drinking anything else and drinking a glass before each meal. After that, try to drink enough to keep your urine a pale yellow color. Stay away from sugary drinks or too much caffeine (which can be a diuretic).



Staying on top of blood sugar control

As the old saying goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Beyond diet, here are [other important tools](#) to keep your blood sugar under control:

Exercise boosts your metabolism, improves your energy levels, helps you control your weight and contributes to your sense of well-being. Most adults should get a minimum of 150 minutes a week of moderate aerobic exercise, whether walking, running, biking or swimming. If it's been a while since you hit the gym, check with your healthcare provider before you embark on anything too ambitious.

Sleep is especially important for people with diabetes. A number of studies have shown [that poor sleep disrupts the hormones that affect your appetite](#). Typically, the more sleep-deprived you are, the hungrier you feel and the more you eat. If you suffer from poor sleep, get help from your doctor or see a specialist if needed.

Monitor your blood sugar levels on a regular basis. That way, you can catch any sharp fall or spike early and address it. Also, keeping a daily record of your blood glucose levels can provide your doctor with long-term trends to set up a treatment plan for you.

Medications like steroids (for instance, drugs used for diseases like rheumatoid arthritis), birth control pills, certain statins, drugs for high blood pressure and certain anti-depressants [can raise your blood sugar](#). Importantly, this does not mean you should stop taking these drugs, but you should be aware of their potential effects. When you are prescribed any new medication, be sure to ask your doctor whether or not it will affect your blood sugar.

It's a process

Your blood sugar management is an ongoing process. You'll likely have a good day here, a bad day there. From these, you'll learn what tweaks you can make to your diet by adjusting the balance between sugar/carbohydrates and protein, fiber and healthy fats. It's a journey, but you're in control.

*This newsletter addresses non-clinical ways to manage diabetes. Please note that diet and exercise without physician intervention are not recommended as treatment.

Sources: <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-lifestyle/lifes-essential-8/how-to-manage-blood-sugar-fact-sheet> | <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/diabetes/in-depth/diabetes-management/art-20047963>
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