

MEALS 
ON WHEELS

More than just a meal.

diabetes





Diabetes is one of the world's fastest growing diseases with more than 600,000 Australians officially diagnosed.

For every one diagnosed, it is estimated that there is another who is not yet diagnosed, making a total of 1.2 million Australians with diabetes. Over recent years, medical knowledge of diabetes has increased significantly. But what do most of us know about it? Often old facts and misconceptions.

So if you suffer from diabetes or you care for someone who has or may be susceptible to diabetes, this handy booklet from Meals on Wheels will give you a good introduction to the latest thinking on how to manage it successfully.

What you'll discover is that dietary recommendations for people with

diabetes have changed.

For instance, today we focus on a diet that's high in fibre and low in fat and a small amount of sugar is actually not a problem. However, frail elderly people might need to relax these guidelines to avoid losing weight. In this case, the diet should not be too strict.

It is reassuring for all our clients to know that the nutritionists that work with Meals on Wheels staff and volunteers have assisted to create menus that are diabetes friendly.

The healthy food choices we recommend to the vast majority of older Australians, include people who have diabetes. That's good news for everyone!



Meals on Wheels: diabetes-friendly.

The reason for this booklet is to provide answers to some of your questions about the meals from Meals on Wheels.

People with diabetes **used to be told** to avoid even tiny amounts of sugar. It is now recommended that the diet be high in fibre and low in fat. A small amount of sugar is not a problem for people with diabetes and can be included in moderation.

What is diabetes?

Having diabetes means that there is too much glucose (sugar) in the blood. This is because the body does not produce enough insulin or the insulin that is produced is not working effectively. Insulin is needed to move glucose from the blood stream into the cells. This glucose in the cells is essential for life. It is like the petrol in a car – it provides energy and helps the body do what it needs to do. Without glucose we could not walk, breathe, think or do any of our day to day activities.

When the body makes less insulin than it needs, then the glucose can be too high in the blood. If blood glucose levels remain high for a long time, then serious health problems can occur, such as heart disease, eye damage, foot ulcers or kidney failure. Making sure that diabetes is well controlled and blood glucose levels stay in the desirable range can prevent these problems. Diabetes is a long term disease, and management is based on a healthy life-style. It is recommended that all Australians include healthy food choices as well as regular activity and keep their weight at a healthy level.

Types of diabetes:

There are several types of diabetes:

Type 1 diabetes usually occurs in people under 30 years of age.

These people will always require insulin injections.

Type 2 diabetes usually occurs in people over 40. They are often overweight and may have other family members who also have diabetes. Healthy lifestyle may be the only treatment to begin with, but as this disease slowly gets worse over time, the person with diabetes may eventually need tablets or perhaps even insulin injections to control blood glucose levels.

Gestational diabetes occurs during pregnancy and usually goes away once the baby is born. There is a high chance that the mother will develop Type 2 diabetes later in life, so should follow a healthy lifestyle to minimise this risk.





Healthy food choices for people with diabetes.

Healthy food choices for people with diabetes are the same as those recommended for all Australians. The following points give some general guidelines about the best foods for diabetes. Keep in mind that Meals on Wheels clients are often elderly and frail. These people should not be as strict with their diet. Their doctor or dietitian can give them individual guidelines. The doctor might choose to increase diabetes medication rather than suggest a strict diet.

Limit foods high in saturated fats.

Saturated fats include animal fats and some of the cheaper vegetable oils like palm oil that are used commercially when making biscuits, cakes, pastries and deep fried foods. These types of fat can increase blood cholesterol levels and should be eaten in small quantities by people with diabetes. This is not so important when a person is frail and eating only small amounts.

Unsaturated fats can help to lower cholesterol levels and protect

against heart disease. They are the best types of fats for people with diabetes and are found in fatty fish, margarine, most oils such as olive oil, canola oil, nuts, seeds, and avocado. However if the person is trying to lose weight even these fats should be eaten in small amounts.

Limit foods high in sugar.

Eating too much sugar does not cause diabetes. However large amounts of sugar can raise blood glucose levels and cause weight gain. Small amounts of sugar such as a little bit in a dessert, a thin spread of jam or honey, or a teaspoon on a bowl of cereal will not cause high blood glucose levels. Even some desserts with a small amount of sugar can be eaten without any problems.

However, it is still important to avoid large quantities of sugar in soft drinks, cordials, lollies, and very sweet desserts, cakes and biscuits. Artificial sweeteners are safe to use and can be useful in products such as diet cordial and diet jelly and added into tea and coffee.

Spread carbohydrate foods over the day.

Carbohydrate foods should not be avoided. Remember that they can provide essential fuel for the body and some of them are important for good nutrition. People with diabetes should not eat very large amounts of carbohydrate at any one time: they should be spread out over the day. The healthy carbohydrates such as wholegrain breads and cereals, starchy vegetables, fruit and milk should be eaten in moderate amounts and at regular times during the day. Added sugars should be limited to small quantities but does not need to be avoided.

Eat regular meals and snacks.

People with diabetes should spread their food out over the day.

They should not skip meals. Some people need to eat small snacks in between meals to prevent blood glucose levels from dropping too low.

Eat more fibre.

High fibre foods such as wholemeal and whole grain breads and cereals, fruit and vegetables, nuts, seeds, dried beans and lentils all provide fibre. A high fibre diet is important for a healthy bowel and also helps blood glucose levels. These foods are also very filling and can be helpful when a person is trying to lose weight.

Choose low glycaemic-index foods.

The Glycaemic Index (GI) is a ranking of foods based on how they effect blood glucose levels. Low GI foods are digested slowly and release glucose gradually into the blood. Low GI foods help to keep the blood glucose levels steadier. Low GI foods include wholegrain breads. A cereal high in bran, porridge, pasta, fruit loaf, milk, most fruits, sweet potato and dried beans and lentils. People with diabetes do not have to eat low GI foods only. Some higher GI foods are still very healthy foods, but it is helpful to include some low GI foods regularly. A dietitian can provide more detailed and individualised advice.

Eat a balanced diet.

It is important to make sure that a person with diabetes still eats a healthy diet. The following table shows the minimum amount of food from each of the food groups that should be eaten every day.

Food Group	Minimum serves per day	Sample of a single serve size
Breads & cereals	3 to 5 serves	2 slices of bread or 1 bread roll 1 cup cooked pasta 2/3 cup cooked rice 60g (approx 1 cup) cereal
Vegetables & legumes	4 to 7 serves	1 potato 1/2 cup cooked veg 1 cup salad veg
Fruit	2–3 serves	1 medium piece: apple, banana 2 small pieces: apricot, plums 1/2 cup juice 1 1/2 tablespoons sultanas
Milk, yoghurt, cheese	2–3 serves	1 cup milk 2 slices (40g) of cheese 200g tub yoghurt
Meat & meat alternatives	1 to 1 1/2 serves	100g cooked meat/chicken/fish: 2 small chops/slices roast meat 1/2 cup cooked dried beans 2 small eggs 1/3 cup peanuts or almonds



Control weight – overweight.

It is very beneficial for people with diabetes to maintain a healthy weight, if possible. Now, if you've been overweight all of your life, that's easier said than done. But even a small amount of weight loss can help to lower the blood-glucose level. The best way to lose weight is to cut down on fatty and sugary foods, and become more active. It is important, however, not to crash-diet or try to lose weight too quickly. The best plan is a slow, sustained weight loss over a long period of time.

Weight loss might not be a desirable goal for some overweight individuals – it may be a sign of poor appetite and lead to poor nutrition. (refer to the next paragraph)

Control weight – underweight.

If a person is underweight, they actually need to gain some weight! Many Meals on Wheels clients are elderly and frail. They might need some high fat foods to stop their weight from dropping too far.

If the person's appetite is poor, it is still important to eat a balanced diet. However, some of the other

guidelines might need to be relaxed a little. For example the person might be encouraged to eat more higher kilojoule foods such as full cream dairy foods, added butter or margarine and other high fat foods to avoid any weight loss. If they have lost a large amount of weight, they should be encouraged to see their doctor for advice.

A word about insulin injections.

People who need insulin injections must be particularly careful to spread their carbohydrate foods over the day. Carbohydrate foods are needed to balance with the insulin injections. Too many carbohydrate foods at one time will mean that the blood glucose levels are too high. Too little carbohydrate might mean that the blood glucose levels go too low. This is called a 'hypo' and can make the person feel unwell. If blood glucose levels do go too low, the person must eat some glucose or sugary food to bring the levels up again such as 6-7 jellybeans or a glass of ordinary soft drink or cordial. If a person is having a lot of these 'hypos' they should see their doctor.

Meals on Wheels meal guide.

The Meals on Wheels' three course midday meal provides a little over a third of an elderly persons nutrition and energy requirements. The following guide gives some ideas about the best foods to serve for individuals with diabetes. Remember that the main Meals on Wheels menu is suitable for anyone and is 'diabetes friendly'.

Soup.

- Any soups are suitable.

Main meal.

- All main meals are suitable, even a sweet and sour dish.
- Include a starchy food such as potato or rice or pasta.

All vegetables are suitable.

Dessert.

Most Meals on Wheels desserts will be suitable even if they are cooked with sugar. A guideline is 5 to 10 grams of sugar (1 to 2 teaspoons) per 150-200 gram serve

- Fresh or stewed or tinned fruit or Meals on Wheels recipe pudding or cake.
- Plus a milky dessert e.g. custard/ yoghurt.

Very sweet desserts such as sticky date pudding or pavlova or cheesecake, are not part of the menu and should be avoided.

A little dried fruit is suitable.

Some people with diabetes might find that their blood glucose levels are a bit higher if they eat all of the meal at once. They might need to spread their Meals on Wheels meal over the day a bit more.

For example, they might need to eat their dessert a bit later or even at afternoon tea time.

If the meal is spread over the afternoon, it is still important to have an evening meal and the other healthy snacks during the day.



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