

Diet and Diabetes

This handout is not intended as a comprehensive guide to diet and diabetes but offers a good starting point. For in-depth diabetes dietary advice, BCDiabetes recommends [LifeStyleRx](#), a physician-led, 100% virtual, 12 week lifestyle management program that is fully funded by the BC Medical Services Plan. It is also covered in Alberta and Ontario.

Dietary modification, where appropriate, is the single most powerful treatment for diabetes - this is because everything we eat, with the exception of fat, turns into sugar. Sugar requires insulin for processing and all people living with diabetes (PLWD) are deficient in insulin in the untreated state. The bigger the meal, and the greater the proportion of starch/carbs in the meal, the more sugar will be produced and the more insulin will be required to prevent the sugar from rising above target (< 10 two hours post meal).

Low carb diets, in association with weight loss where indicated, have been associated with [diabetes remission](#) - meaning that normal sugar can be maintained without diabetes medication for many months, potentially years. When diabetes remission continues for years it is sometimes termed “diabetes reversal”. Some [experimental drugs](#) also promise to reverse diabetes by regenerating the cells that produce insulin, known as beta cells. Insulin deficiency, due to loss of beta cells is ultimately the cause of diabetes.

Low carb diets are not recommended for diabetes in pregnancy: rather a total carbohydrate intake of 150-200g/day is recommended (e.g. 20g breakfast, 50g lunch, 50g dinner, three snacks of 10-15g during the day) with low GI (see below), high fibre options.

No foods are forbidden, but every person living with diabetes (PLWD) who tests their sugar knows that some foods are better than others. Simple carbs (sugar, juice, regular pop, white rice & noodles, white bread, white potatoes) are best avoided or taken in small quantities/portions. A useful guide to what is a good choice can be made by considering the [glycemic index](#) (GI, see <https://www.glycemicindex.com/>). Use [their search tool](#). See below with entries Category = grains, GI = 55 (and underneath it choosing filter = less than). Other categories include “vegetables” & “dairy”. Under Food Name you could enter rice, wheat, corn or barley.

Food Name: Category: Country:

GI: Serving Size (g): Carbs Per Serve (g): GL:

Less Than Filter Filter

Show entries

Food Name	GI	Serving Size (g)	Carbs Per Serve (g)	GL
American, easy-cook rice, consumed with 10 g margarine	49	150	46	22

Low glycemic index foods (GI < 55) are more slowly digested, and absorbed and cause a lower and slower rise in blood glucose.

For **weight maintenance** BCDiabetes recommends meals made up of green veggies, salads, legumes and/or fish & meats with carbs kept to small portions of GI <55.

For **weight loss** BCDiabetes recommends a time-restricted diet (a form of [intermittent fasting](#)), where eating is only allowed within a certain time window. The rationale is that by reducing the time during which eating is allowed, fewer calories are consumed. Or put simply, fewer meals results in fewer calories consumed. Each meal consumed during the time window should be the same as under Weight Maintenance above. By default BCDiabetes recommends an 8 hour eating window such as between 12 midday & 8 PM. If an 8 hour window is too stressful, try a 10 hour window such as between 10 AM & 8 PM.

Ketogenic diets are diets that are not only low in carbs (<10% of total calories) but also restricted in protein (<20% of total calories) such that fat constitutes >70% of overall calories. While BCDiabetes does not recommend ketogenic diets, preferring simple low carb diets, it does acknowledge that such diets are associated with excellent glucose control and often, with sustainable weight loss. [Individuals living with diabetes on ketogenic diets who are on insulin and/or SGLT-2 inhibitor medication \(such as empagliflozin, canagliflozin or dapagliflozin\) or insulin should measure their blood ketones regularly and target a ketone value no higher than 3.0.](#)

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