



### Food and Diabetes – The First Steps

Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

Management of Diabetes involves having a healthy lifestyle. This includes being a healthy weight, following a healthy diet and including regular physical activity. You may also need to take some tablets/insulin to help control your diabetes.

#### Try To:

1. **Be a healthy weight.** If you are overweight try to lose some weight. Even a small amount of weight loss can be beneficial for Diabetes management and general health.
2. **Eat 3 regular meals everyday** and choose healthy snacks, if necessary.
3. **Each meal should contain some starchy carbohydrate food** such as some bread, breakfast cereal, potato, pasta or rice. Try to include high fibre varieties wherever possible e.g. wholegrain/wholemeal/brown breads, wholegrain breakfast cereals. Remember the amount of these foods you eat will influence your diabetes control – be aware of your portion size.
4. **Reduce your total fat intake** by decreasing the amount of butter, processed meats, cream, crisps, chips, biscuits, pastries and fried foods you eat. Choose lean choices of meat and remove any visible fat from meat or chicken. Instead of frying food, use low fat methods of cooking: oven bake, roast, grill (without adding fat or oil), boil, poach, steam or microwave. Choose low fat dairy products (milk, cheese and yoghurt).
5. **Eating oily fish can help** reduce your risk of heart disease as it contains omega – 3 fat which is good for your heart. Try to eat oily fish such as salmon, herring, mackerel, sardines, pilchards, kippers or trout twice a week. These can be fresh, frozen, tinned or vacuum packed. **NOTE:** Tuna fish that is fresh or frozen contains the omega-3 fat but tinned tuna is not a rich source as it is lost during processing. Please let your doctor know if you are taking cod liver oil or an omega 3 fat supplement.
6. **Eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables** everyday. These are rich in vitamins, and are an excellent source of soluble fibre which is good for bowel and heart health. As fruit contains natural sugar, spread fruit intake over the day i.e. 1 portion at a time.
7. **Reduce your sugar intake** – consider an artificial sweetener in place of sugar; use jam, honey, marmalade and pure fruit spreads sparingly (choose those with less than 35-40g carbohydrate per 100g); choose drinks with no added sugar. Reduce intake of sweets, chocolate, cakes, biscuits, jellies and consider yoghurts with no added sugar.
8. **Take 30 minutes of physical activity** most days. Walking is ideal.
9. **It is not necessary to spend money on special diabetic foods.** These are expensive and if taken in excess can cause diarrhoea. They can be high in calories and may lead to weight gain.