



## **The Right Diet for Prediabetes**

### **What is prediabetes?**

A prediabetes diagnosis can be alarming. This condition is marked by abnormally high blood sugar (glucose) most often due to insulin resistance. This is a condition in which the body doesn't use insulin properly. It's often a precursor to type 2 diabetes.

According to the Mayo Clinic, people with prediabetes are more likely to develop type 2 diabetes within 10 years. With prediabetes, you may also be at risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

However, a prediabetes diagnosis doesn't mean you will definitely get type 2 diabetes. The key is early intervention; to get your blood sugar out of the prediabetes range. Your diet is important, and you need to know the right kind of foods to eat.

### **How diet relates to prediabetes**

There are many factors that increase your risk for prediabetes. Genetics can play a role, especially if diabetes runs in your family. Excess body fat and a sedentary lifestyle are other potential risk factors. In prediabetes, sugar from food begins to build up in your bloodstream because insulin can't easily move it into your cells.

Eating carbohydrates doesn't cause prediabetes. But a diet filled with carbohydrates that digest quickly can lead to blood sugar spikes. For most people with prediabetes, your body has a difficult time lowering blood sugar levels after meals. Avoiding blood sugar spikes can help.

When you eat more calories than your body needs, they get stored as fat. This can cause you to gain weight. Body fat, especially around the belly, is linked to insulin resistance. This explains why many people with prediabetes are also overweight.

### **Watch carbs with the glycemic index**

The glycemic index (GI) is a tool you can use to determine how a particular food could impact your blood sugar. Foods that are high on the GI will raise your blood sugar faster. Foods ranked low on the scale are less likely to cause spikes. Foods with high fiber are low on the GI. Foods that are processed, cooked, or canned register high on the GI. Refined carbohydrates rank high on the GI. These are grain products that digest quickly in your stomach. Examples are white bread, russet potatoes, and white rice, along with soda and juice. Limit these foods whenever

possible if you have prediabetes. Foods that rank medium on the GI are fine to eat. Examples include whole wheat bread and brown rice. Still they aren't as good as foods that rank low on the GI.

Foods that are low on the GI are best for your blood sugar. Incorporate the following items in your diet:

- steel-cut oats (not instant oatmeal)
- stone-ground whole wheat bread
- non-starchy vegetables, such as carrots and field greens
- beans
- sweet potatoes
- corn
- pasta (preferably whole wheat)

Food and nutrition labels don't reveal the GI of a given item. Instead make note of the fiber content listed on the label to help determine a food's GI ranking. Remember to limit saturated fat intake to reduce the risk of developing high cholesterol and heart disease, along with prediabetes.

Eating mixed meals is a great way to lower a food's given GI. For example, if you plan to eat white rice, add vegetables and chicken to slow down the digestion of the grain and minimize spikes.

### **Portion control**

Good portion control can keep your diet on the low GI. This means you limit the amount of food you eat. Often, portions in the U.S. are much larger than intended serving sizes. A bagel serving size is usually about one-half, yet many people eat the whole bagel.

Food labels can help you determine how much you're eating. The label will list calories, fat, carbohydrates, and other nutrition information for a particular serving. If you eat more than the serving listed, it's important to understand how that will impact the nutritional value. A food may have 20 grams of carbohydrate and 150 calories per serving. But if you have two servings, you've consumed 40 grams of carbohydrate and 300 calories.

One of the best methods to manage portions is to practice mindful eating. Eat when you are hungry. Stop when you are full. Sit and eat, slowly. Focus on the food and flavors.

### **Eating more fiber-rich foods**

Fiber offers several benefits. It helps you feel fuller, longer. Fiber adds bulk to your diet, making bowel movements easier to pass. Eating fiber-rich foods can make you less likely to overeat. They also help you avoid the "crash" that can come from eating a high-sugar food. These types of foods will often give you a big boost of energy, but make you feel tired shortly after.

Examples of high-fiber foods include:

- beans and legumes
- fruits and vegetables that have an edible skin
- whole-grain breads
- whole grains such as quinoa or barley
- whole grain cereals
- whole wheat pasta

### **Cut out sugary drinks**

A single, 12 ounce can of soda can contain 45 grams of carbohydrates. That number is the recommended carbohydrate serving for a meal for women with diabetes. Sugary sodas only offer empty calories that translate to quick-digesting carbohydrates. Water is a better choice to quench your thirst.

### **Drink alcohol in moderation**

Moderation is a healthy rule to live by in most instances. Drinking alcohol is no exception. Many alcoholic beverages are dehydrating. Some cocktails may contain high sugar levels that can spike your blood sugar. According to the American Diabetes Association, women should only have one drink per day while men should limit themselves to no more two drinks per day. Drink servings relate back to portion control. The following are the measurements for an average single drink:

- 1 bottle of beer (12 fluid ounces)
- 1 glass of wine (5 fluid ounces)
- 1 shot of distilled spirits, such as gin, vodka or whiskey (1.5 fluid ounces)

Keep your drink as simple as possible. Avoid adding sugary juices or liqueurs. Keep a glass of water nearby that you can sip on to prevent dehydration.

### **Eat lean meats**

Meat doesn't contain carbohydrates, but it can be a significant source of saturated fat in your diet. Eating a lot of meat can lead to high cholesterol levels. If you have prediabetes, a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol can help reduce your risk of heart disease. It's recommended that you avoid cuts of meat with visible fat or skin.

Choose protein sources such as the following:

- chicken without skin
- egg substitute or egg whites
- beans and legumes
- soybean products such as tofu and tempeh
- fish, such as cod, flounder, haddock, halibut, tuna, or trout

- lean beef cuts, such as flank steak, ground round, tenderloin, and roast with fat trimmed
- shellfish, such as crab, lobster, shrimp, or scallops
- turkey without skin
- low fat Greek yogurt

Very lean cuts of meat have about 0 to 1 g of fat and 35 calories per ounce. High-fat meat choices, such as spareribs can have more than 7 grams of fat and 100 calories per ounce.

### **Drinking plenty of water**

Water is an important part of any healthy diet. Drink enough water each day to keep you from becoming dehydrated. If you have prediabetes water is a healthier alternative than sugary sodas, juices, and energy drinks. The amount of water you should drink every day depends on your body size, activity level, and the climate you live in. You can determine if you're drinking enough water by monitoring the volume of urine when you go. Also make note of the color. Your urine should be pale yellow.

### **Exercise and diet go together**

Exercise is a part of any healthy lifestyle. It's especially important for those with prediabetes. A lack of physical activity has been linked to increased insulin resistance, according to the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK). Exercise causes muscles to use glucose for energy, and makes the cells work more effectively with insulin.

The NIDDK recommends exercising five days a week for at least 30 minutes. Exercise doesn't have to be strenuous or overly complicated. Walking, dancing, riding a bicycle, taking an exercise class, or finding another activity you enjoy are all examples of physical activity.

### **Breaking the prediabetes chain**

The CDC estimates that 79 million, or 35 percent of U.S. adults over the age of 20, have prediabetes. Perhaps even more concerning is that a mere 7 percent know they have the condition. Early medical intervention is important in order to catch the condition before it turns into type 2 diabetes. If you've been diagnosed with prediabetes, you and your doctor can develop a diet plan that will help.