

Nutrition in diabetes and obesity: points to remember



Treatment of diabetes comprises of diet, also called medical nutrition therapy, exercise, medication and monitoring.

Despite spectacular developments in diabetes management diet in diabetes remains a very sensitive and controversial issue amongst patients and even their physicians. Many a time patients are at a loss to properly interpret a diet chart and implement its recommendations in their day to day life. As a result often confusion and frustration set in and compliance to medical nutrition therapy suffers ultimately resulting in poor glycemic control. Moreover, nutrition therapy in diabetes does not end with the patient being given a printed diet chart. Medical nutrition therapy in subjects with diabetes has to be individualized taking into account the patient's body weight, food habits, meal pattern, likes and dislikes, and co-existing illnesses. This short article attempts to address some of the controversies and clear many misconceptions particularly amongst patients.

- ✓ **There is nothing called *diabetic diet*** ; diet in diabetes should be a healthy and balanced one
- ✓ Food for persons with diabetes need **not** be cooked separately ; diet appropriate for a person with diabetes is equally good for a person not having the disease
- ✓ Generally speaking, a person with diabetes need **not** take any special proprietary health food or health drink if he/she is able to consume a balanced diet
- ✓ There is **no difference between rice and wheat** : persons with diabetes, like other people, can consume rice or *chapatti* according to his/her liking, but within the amount stipulated by the physician or dietitian
- ✓ However, cereal preparations containing more oil or ghee such as fried rice, biriyani, polao, paratha, luchi should be avoided
- ✓ **Potatoes** and vegetables grown underground are **not strictly forbidden** ; they can be consumed within permissible limits
- ✓ All vegetables are allowed in persons with diabetes: green leafy vegetables are particularly good. Green salads without dressings serve as good fillers

- ✓ **Fruits**, though taste sweet, are **good for health** : they contain fibers, vitamins and minerals; all fruits are permissible within stipulated limits(except under special circumstances)
- ✓ **Use of oil, ghee, butter, vanaspati etc should be kept to a minimum** ; cooking practices should be modified to prepare palatable dishes using as little oils and fats as feasible
- ✓ Mustard oil, rice bran oil, sunflower oil, safflower oil can be used in combination as cooking media ; both butter and margarine should be avoided
- ✓ Consumption of egg yolk and meats like mutton and beef on a regular basis is discouraged ,more so in persons having elevated cholesterol
- ✓ Frank sugar is best avoided; **artificial sweeteners** like sachharin, aspartame and sucralose **are safe**. Sucralose can be used in cooking as its sweetness is not destroyed on heating
- ✓ **Fast foods should be best avoided** ; eating out and dinning at social gatherings have to be kept at a minimum ; similarly **fasting** for religious or other reasons is also **not encouraged** on medical grounds
- ✓ Occasional cautious indulgence in high calorie palatable preparations may be acceptable but such indulgence should not be too frequent or too much
- ✓ **Smoking or use of tobacco in any form is strongly discouraged**
- ✓ Alcohol consumption also is generally not encouraged; however alcohol in limited quantities may be allowed occasionally if other coexistent medical conditions such as high triglyceride level or liver disease do not contraindicate its use. **Associated snacking is actively discouraged** : green salads may be used as accompaniments instead of nuts and fried snacks

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