FIVE TIPS FOR NAVIGATING THE HOLIDAYS

Gearing up for the holidays can mean putting up decorations, coordinating plans with family, and lots of food preparation. This might also be the first time you have had to plan for the holiday with a health concern, like diabetes or pre-diabetes. Even if you’ve been celebrating holidays for years with diabetes in mind, there are some simple strategies that can make maneuvering the holiday table a lot easier. (1)

1. Follow the Plate Method
Before you get to the day of the event, think of the recipes your family normally brings to holiday meals. Visualizing the foods that you definitely want to enjoy on your plate can make mealtime choices easier.

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**HOLIDAYS (CONTINUED)**

Be sure to fill half of your plate with non-starchy vegetables and then split the other half with a protein and starchier recipes. If there aren’t many non-starchy vegetable options on the menu, bring some! The Diabetes Food Hub website has recipes to spark inspiration, like Bell Pepper Poppers, Roasted Brussels Sprouts with Cranberries, and Roasted Carrots with Herbs. You can even search the word ‘holiday’ to refine your options to recipes that you might find around this time of year. Some starchy recipes can be modified to have a lower carbohydrate content by subbing in veggies, like the recipe for “Better Mashed Potatoes” shared in this issue of Diabetes Life Lines, which is made with potatoes and cauliflower and can be prepared with the same seasonings you would normally use.

If cooking isn’t your thing and you would rather choose from what’s available on the table, no worries!

Many common holiday foods fit in the Diabetes Plate Method of planning (Figure 1).

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**PROTEINS:** TURKEY, HAM, DEVILED EGGS, BEANS, LENTILS, SOME MEAT SUBSTITUTES LIKE TOFU, MIXED NUTS

**NON-STARCHY VEGETABLES:** ROASTED VEGETABLES LIKE BELL PEPPERS, ONIONS AND ZUCCHINI, ROASTED OR STREWED GREENS, LIKE COLLARDS AND TURNIP GREENS, LEAFY SALADS, VEGGIE APPETIZER TRAYS

**CARBOHYDRATE OPTIONS:** MASHED POTATOES, LATKES, SQUASH CASSEROLE, MACARONI AND CHEESE, SWEET POTATO SOUFFLÉ, PUMPKIN OR PECAN PIE, DINNER ROLLS, MOON CAKES, CRANBERRY SAUCE, CHALLAH, SAMOSA

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2. **Be Kind to Yourself**
Holidays with family are a time to provide support and enjoy each other’s company. If you have trouble staying on track with your goals, know that the next meal is a clean slate. Keep in mind what motivates you and be kind to yourself.

3. **Eat Breakfast**
It can be tempting to bypass breakfast in order to save room for the holiday meal, but skipping meals can make it harder to make food choices that feel good later and may wreak havoc on your blood glucose. Eating a nutritious breakfast can help keep your blood glucose stable over the course of the day.

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5. Find Support
Reach out to a trusted healthcare provider, family member, coworker, or friend and let them know what your plans are for the holidays and what parts you’re worried about. Ask them to check in with you and for help with gentle motivation to stay on track.

Remember why you have decided to take care of your health and keep that at the forefront of your mind during the holidays.

4. Find Fun Ways to be Active
Whether it’s with your family or in your community, you can add some holiday fun to your physical activity routine. It can be as simple as going for a walk around the neighborhood or taking a few laps around a mall or shopping center. Find a local race that you can walk or run. Or, get your heart pumping indoors with seated cardio exercises.

Many find acts of service to be an important part of the holidays, but did you know they can help you stay physically active, too? Give back to your community by volunteering at a food bank, serving at your spiritual center, or offering to help a neighbor with chores like clearing leaves.
DEFINING REMISSION IN TYPE 2 DIABETES

People with type 2 diabetes may wonder, “Can I be cured?” Scientists and researchers have studied this question. We know that people can have major improvement in their diabetes. Some ways to manage diabetes are with diet and lifestyle changes, medical, or surgical interventions. But can type 2 diabetes be truly “reversed” or “cured?” The American Diabetes Association (ADA) is working to address this question.

The ADA addresses the way we describe the improvement in blood glucose measures in people with type 2 diabetes in a new report. Remember that diabetes is diagnosed by blood tests showing a Hemoglobin A1c (A1C) or fasting blood sugar (fasting plasma glucose) higher than normal. (figure 2). ADA determined “remission” is the most appropriate word to describe a long-term improvement in blood glucose.

They defined remission as:
- hemoglobin A1c of 6.5 or below and remaining at that level without the use of blood glucose lowering medications for at least three months.

They recommend waiting at least six months after making lifestyle changes before re-checking lab work. This allows enough time to see the result of lifestyle changes. Check your A1C at least once per year if you have diabetes.
REMISSION, CONTINUED

Why did they choose “remission?” Using the term remission makes it clearer that while diabetes may not always be active or worsening, normal blood glucose levels may not be permanent. We commonly hear the term remission used in reference to cancer. Similarly, a diabetes remission isn’t intended to erase the history of a diagnosis but to describe the current absence of active disease or progression. It also indicates the need to continue to monitor the condition.

The ADA notes that improvement in blood glucose levels is most likely when changes are made early in the course of the disease. Both insulin secretion (how much insulin you make) and insulin action (how well your body uses insulin) may improve with these changes. Eating healthier and getting more exercise will also benefit you in other ways. Heart health, mental health, and sleep can also improve with these changes. It is helpful to keep in mind the total effects of a healthy lifestyle to stay motivated.

Be careful of products promising a quick cure or reversal for type 2 diabetes. Experts do not give a definition for curing or reversing diabetes. Therefore, it is not possible to truly claim to cure or reverse diabetes. It is exciting that with lifestyle changes and medical interventions, people with type 2 diabetes can see significant improvements in their blood sugar control enough to say diabetes is in remission. Keep working hard and talk to your doctor about when it is time to check your A1C again.
STAND UP FOR YOUR HEALTH

Have you ever heard that “sitting is the new smoking?” Thanks to advances in technology, we are spending more time than ever before seated in front of a television, computer, or other device. When you add in good old-fashioned entertainment like crocheting, crosswords, or card games, that’s a lot of sitting. It’s estimated that the average American sits 6.5 to 8 hours per day.(6) Americans spend over half their day in sedentary, or mostly seated, activity.

Spending long periods of time sitting increases risk for diabetes, heart disease, and early death. (7) Sitting is associated with insulin resistance, and higher blood glucose and cholesterol levels. Adding in light activity breaks reduces your risk for chronic illnesses. These small breaks in sitting may be especially effective for people with diabetes in lowering blood glucose levels. Aim for a two-minute activity break for every 30 minutes of sitting. Start by taking a two-minute activity break every few hours. You can work your way up to taking a break every hour, and eventually, every 30 minutes.

The great thing about activity breaks is that any light activity helps. Don’t worry about breaking a sweat, just get moving! What counts? In short, anything but sitting. Read on for some ideas:

**Multitask.** It is easy to get absorbed into a task and lose track of time. If you usually sit down while talking on the phone, try making calls while standing or walking. At work, go to a restroom on a different floor or use a trash bin down the hall instead of the one in your office to give yourself a built-in activity break. At home, take a short break to do a chore, like watering plants, doing dishes, or checking the mail box. This gives an immediate payoff in addition to the long-term health benefits of movement.

**Lighten the mood.** Deep breathing, dancing, or shadow boxing are ways to break up bouts of sitting while also improving your mood. Turn on a favorite tune and dance away. Breathe deeply with your belly, inhaling for a count of four, holding for a count of four, and exhaling for a count of four. After a couple of minutes, you’ll be energized and refreshed – no caffeine needed.

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STAND, CONTINUED

Relax your body. Stretching is an excellent way to release tension and get moving. Practice relaxing your shoulders and rolling them forwards and backwards to ease tension. Keep a tennis ball handy and roll it back and forth under your feet for a mini massage. Stand up and take a couple of minutes to wiggle, stretch, and notice what feels good in your body.

Remember that when it comes to breaking up long periods of sitting, any movement is better than no movement and the objective is simply to move more and sit less.

RECIPE CORNER: BETTER MASHED POTATOES
Yield: 10-1/2 cup servings
1/3 cup low fat buttermilk
1 head cauliflower (cut into small florets, discard core & stem)
5 cloves garlic, peeled
1 russet or baking potato (peeled and cut into 2-inch cubes)
1 tablespoon olive oil
2 teaspoons butter
2 tablespoons grated parmesan cheese
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon black pepper
Optional: fresh chives (garnish)
Instructions:
In a large saucepan, place the potato, garlic, and cauliflower and enough water to cover. Bring to boiling, reduce heat to medium, and cook until the potato and cauliflower are tender, about 15 minutes. Drain and add the vegetables and garlic back to the pot. Cover the pot with a kitchen towel and put the lid over the towel (away from hot stovetop). Let stand for 5 minutes. Remove lid and towel. This process helps to dry the vegetables so they mash better. Add the buttermilk, cheese, olive oil, butter, salt, and pepper. Mash just until the ingredients are lightly combined. If desired, garnish with fresh chives.

Recipe source: www.diabetesfoodhub.org

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Dear Friend,

Diabetes Life Lines is a bi-monthly publication sent to you by your local county Extension agent.

It is written by an Extension Nutrition and Health Specialist and other health professionals from the University of Georgia. This newsletter brings you the latest information on diabetes self-management, healthy recipes, and news about important diabetes-related events.

If you would like more information, please contact your local county Extension Office.

Yours truly,

County Extension Agent

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