

# **1,200-Calorie Diabetic Diet**

This is a guide to the 1,200-calorie diabetic diet. While many people find this type of diet plan useful, 1,200 calories is too little for most people and therefore can be dangerous. The American Diabetes Association recommends that you talk to a registered dietitian (RD) about obtaining an individualized meal plan.

You can use several methods to reach your 1,200-calorie goal. Two common methods are the **diabetic exchange system** and **carbohydrate (“carb”) counting**. More details on each of these methods are provided below.

## **Diabetic Exchanges**

The exchange system groups foods into one of six categories: starches, meat and meat substitutes, vegetables, fruits, milk, and fats. Serving for serving, foods in each of these categories have similar amounts of carbohydrate, protein, and fat. This means that each food in a particular category can be “exchanged” for another food in that same category.

Here is a typical breakdown of these categories for a 1,200-calorie diet that is based on 50% carbohydrate, 20% protein, and 30% fat:

	Starches	Lean Meats	Vegetables	Fruits	Low Fat (1%) Milk	Fats
<b>Breakfast</b>	1	0	0	1	1	1
<b>Lunch</b>	2	2	1	0	0	1
<b>Snack 1</b>	0	0	0	1	0	0
<b>Dinner</b>	2	2	1	0	1	1
<b>Snack 2</b>	0	0	0	1	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>

## **Carbohydrate (or “Carb”) Counting**

The foods that raise blood sugar the most are those that are high in carbohydrates (eg, starches, sugars, milk, fruit, and sweets.) Carbohydrate counting is particularly useful for people who take insulin shots, since it allows you to balance food intake with insulin—the more carbohydrates you eat, the higher your blood sugar will be, and the more insulin you will need. Of course, you should always ask your doctor before adjusting insulin doses on your own.

Because carbohydrate counting focuses only on the carbohydrates in different foods, it allows for more flexibility than the exchange system. The foods listed in the starch, fruit, and milk exchange lists contain the same amount of carbohydrates per serving—15 grams.

This is about the amount of carbohydrate in one slice of bread, ¾ cup dry, unsweetened cereal, ½ cup of pasta, one cup of milk, or one small piece of fresh fruit. Since they have similar effects on your blood sugar, they can also be “exchanged” since they are generally considered “carbohydrate servings.” For example, you may trade one starch serving for one fruit or milk serving.

Most people with diabetes should consume between 45% to 65% of their calories as carbohydrates (and the rest from fat and protein). Remember, a registered dietitian can help you determine and calculate the best individualized meal plan for you.

On a 1,200-calorie diet that is 50% carbohydrate, you can have a total of 10 servings of carbohydrate per day. How you distribute these servings will affect your blood sugar and should, therefore, be kept consistent from day to day. But, you can adjust it as necessary to keep blood sugars within your target range.

The bottom line is you should space out your carbohydrate servings into at least three meals per day. In addition, the more fiber the carbohydrates contain, the better the effect on your blood sugar. The below table shows examples of different ways that these 10 carbohydrates could be distributed:

<b>Breakfast</b>	3	2	2	2	3	2	0
<b>AM Snack</b>	0	0	1	0	0	2	3
<b>Lunch</b>	3	4	2	3	2	2	2
<b>PM Snack</b>	0	0	1	1	0	2	1
<b>Dinner</b>	4	4	2	3	3	2	3
<b>Evening Snack</b>	0	0	2	1	2	0	1
<b>TOTAL CARBS</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>

Keep in mind that when carb counting, foods consisting mainly of protein and fat (eg, meat, margarine) should be eaten in moderation even though they are not technically counted. If they are eaten in excess, you may exceed 1,200 calories and gain weight.

The article on the [Diabetic Exchange Diet](#) lists the average carbohydrate content of different foods and food categories. There are books available that provide more comprehensive carbohydrate count lists. In addition, most packaged foods have labels that list their carbohydrate counts.

Food labels are the most accurate way to determine the carbohydrate count of a food. If you eat many high fiber foods, you may want to talk to a dietitian about label reading to learn how to subtract the “dietary fiber” grams from the “total carbohydrate” grams. Because the body does not absorb fiber, it provides no calories and does not affect your blood sugar. However, it is counted in the “total carbohydrates,” so subtraction gives you a more accurate estimate of the carbohydrates that will affect your blood sugar.

**Sample 1,200-Calorie Diet Menu**

<b>Breakfast</b>	<b>Lunch</b>	<b>Dinner</b>
¾ cup unsweetened cereal 8 ounces 1% or skim milk ½ grapefruit Tea or coffee	2 slices whole-grain bread 2 ounces smoked turkey Lettuce 2 teaspoons mayonnaise 1 small apple Mineral water	2 ounces baked cod 2/3 cup brown rice ½ cup steamed broccoli ½ cup zucchini (sautéed in 1 teaspoon olive oil) Mineral water
<b>Snack 1</b>	<b>Snack 2</b>	
½ medium banana	6 ounces low-fat yogurt (plain or sweetened with artificial sweetener)	

**Points to Consider**

This diet will be easier to follow once you become familiar with the serving sizes for each category of food and also how many carbohydrates the different categories of food typically contain. In general, you will want to spread out your exchanges or carbohydrate servings over the course of a day (eg, three meals and two or three snacks).

## **Diabetes Exchange Diet**

The diabetes exchange system can help you select the right amount of different types of foods to eat each day. Eating a well-balanced diet will help your blood sugar stay within a healthy range.

### ***The Exchange Categories***

The exchange system groups foods into one of six categories: starches, meat and meat substitutes, vegetables, fruits, milk, and fats. There are also some foods that are considered “free” foods because they contain such a low amount of calories and/or carbohydrates.

Serving for serving, foods in each of these categories have similar amounts of carbohydrate, protein, and fat. This means that each food in a particular category can be “exchanged” for another food in that same category.

Many foods are made up of more than one food category, so they will not fall nicely into just one of the diabetes exchange categories. These types of foods are known as “combination foods.”

### ***Points to Consider***

The number of servings, or “exchanges,” from a category that you can consume each day depends on how many calories you need.

The key to mastering the diabetes exchange system is becoming familiar with the serving sizes for each category, and also how much carbohydrate, protein, and fat the foods in each category typically contains.

Distribute your exchanges over the course of a day and be consistent about following this pattern everyday. This will spread out the amount of carbohydrates that you are consuming, which will help regulate your blood sugar.

The foods listed below in the starch, fruit, and milk categories contain the same amount of carbohydrates per serving, 15 grams. Since they have similar effects on your blood sugar, these foods can also be “exchanged” because they are generally considered “carbohydrate servings.” For example, you may trade 1 starch serving for 1 fruit or milk serving.

A common misconception is that at any given meal, you are limited to eating only the serving sizes listed below, which many people consider small. The exchange system is not quite that restrictive. For example, ½ cup mashed potato counts as 1 serving of starch, or 1 “carbohydrate serving.” But if you are allotted 3 servings of “carbohydrate” at dinner, you could skip other starches, fruits and milks, and choose to have *all* of your carbohydrate as potato. Thus you would eat 1½ cups of mashed potato. Nonetheless, this is probably a restriction for most people, but perhaps not quite as restrictive as it first may appear.

The exchange system is helpful not only in diabetes, but also for regulating weight.

## The Exchange Lists

The below tables show each of the different exchange categories, the amount of carbohydrates, protein, fat, and calories one serving of a particular category provides, and examples of different foods and their portion sizes for each category.

### Starches

\_\_\_\_\_ servings per day

One starch exchange = 15 grams carbohydrate, 3 grams protein, 0-1 grams fat, 80 calories

Type	One Exchange/Serving
Bagel (varies), 4 ounces	¼ of a bagel (1 ounce)
Bread (white, pumpernickel, whole wheat, rye)	1 slice
Bread, reduced calorie or "lite"	2 slices
Broth-based soup	1 cup
Cooked beans, peas, or corn	½ cup
Cooked cereal	½ cup
Crackers	4-6
English muffin, hot dog bun, or hamburger bun	½
Pasta, rice	1/3 cup
Popcorn, air popped, no fat added	3 cups
Potato	1 small (3 ounces) or ½ cup mashed
Pretzels	¾ ounce
Sweet potato or yam	½ cup
Tortilla	1 small
Unsweetened, dry cereal	¾ cup

Fiber is what makes one carbohydrate better than another. Remember to choose higher fiber breads and bread products for a better effect on your blood sugar.

### Non-Starchy Vegetables

\_\_\_\_\_ servings per day

One vegetable exchange = 5 grams carbohydrate, 2 grams protein, 0 grams fat, and 25 calories

Type	One Exchange/Serving
Cooked vegetables	½ cup
Raw vegetables	1 cup
Tomato or vegetable juice	½ cup

Three servings of non-starchy vegetables add up to one serving of "carbohydrate," meaning a bread, fruit, or milk exchange. For example, if you eat a large salad with 3 cups of vegetables, you should count that as 1 serving of carbohydrate.

## Fruits

\_\_\_\_\_ servings per day

One fruit exchange = 15 grams carbohydrate, 0 grams protein, 0 grams fat, and 60 calories

Type	One Exchange/Serving
Canned fruit	½ cup
Dried fruit	¼ cup
Fresh fruit	1 small or 1 cup (eg, cut up or berries)
Fruit juice	½ cup

Although whole fruits and fruit juices have the same amount of carbohydrate (in the servings listed above), it's usually better to choose the whole fruit more often because it has fiber.

## Milk

\_\_\_\_\_ servings per day

One milk exchange = 12 grams carbohydrate and 8 grams protein (Fat and calories vary as listed below.)

Type	One Exchange/Serving
<b>0-3 grams fat and 90 calories per serving</b>	
Nonfat or low-fat milk	1 cup
Plain, nonfat yogurt	¾ cup
Nonfat or low-fat soy milk	1 cup
<b>5 grams fat and 120 calories per serving</b>	
2% Milk	1 cup
Soy milk	1 cup
Yogurt, plain, low-fat	¾ cup
<b>8 grams fat and 150 calories per serving</b>	
Whole milk	1 cup
Yogurt, plain (made from whole milk)	¾ cup

Keep in mind that only the milk products that are in fluid form, such as milk and yogurt, typically have carbohydrate. Cheese, on the other hand, is considered a high-fat meat substitute. You can remember this because when cheese is made, the curd (solid) is separated from the whey (liquid).

## Meat and Meat Substitutes

\_\_\_\_\_ servings per day

One very lean meat exchange = 0 grams carbohydrate, 7 grams protein, 0-1 grams fat, and 35 calories

One lean meat exchange = 0 grams carbohydrate, 7 grams protein, 3 grams fat, and 55 calories  
One medium-fat meat exchange = 0 grams carbohydrate, 7 grams protein, 5 grams fat, and 75 calories

One high-fat meat exchange = 0 grams carbohydrate, 7 grams protein, 8 grams fat, and 100 calories

Type	One Exchange/Serving
<b><i>Very lean meats and substitutes</i></b>	
Egg substitutes, plain	¼ cup
Egg whites	2
Fish: fresh or frozen cod, flounder, haddock, halibut, trout, tuna	1 ounce
Nonfat or low-fat cottage cheese	¼ cup
Poultry: chicken or turkey, white meat, no skin	1 ounce
Shellfish	1 ounce
<b><i>Lean meat and substitutes</i></b>	
Beef: round, sirloin, flank, tenderloin, roast, steak, ground round (trimmed of fat)	1 ounce
Fish: herring, salmon, catfish, tuna (canned in oil, drained)	1 ounce
Parmesan cheese	2 tablespoons
Pork: lean pork, such as fresh ham, Canadian bacon, tenderloin, center loin chop	1 ounce
Poultry: Chicken or turkey (dark meat, no skin); chicken (white meat with skin)	1 ounce
Tofu, light	½ cup or 4 ounces
Veal: lean chop, roast	1 ounce
<b><i>Medium-fat meat and substitutes</i></b>	
Beef: most beef products (ground beef, meatloaf, corned beef, short ribs, prime rib)	1 ounce
Cheese with 5 grams or less of fat per ounce: feta, mozzarella	1 ounce (ricotta 2 ounces)
Egg	1
Lamb: rib roast, ground	1 ounce
Pork: top loin, chop, cutlet	1 ounce
Poultry: chicken (dark meat with skin), ground turkey or ground chicken, fried chicken (with skin)	1 ounce
Sausage with 5 grams or less of fat per ounce	1 ounce
Tofu	½ cup or 4 ounces
<b><i>High-fat meat and substitutes</i></b>	
Cheeses: all regular cheese (eg, American, cheddar, Monterey Jack, Swiss)	1 ounce
Hot dog (beef, pork, or combination)—count as 1 high-fat meat plus 1 fat exchange	1 ounce
Peanut butter	1 tablespoon
Pork: spareribs, ground pork, pork sausage	1 ounce
Processed sandwich meats: bologna, salami	1 ounce
Sausage (eg, Italian, bratwurst)	1 ounce

It is best to choose meats that are lean and very lean more often than medium-fat or high-fat meats.

## Fats

\_\_\_\_\_ servings per day

One fat exchange = 0 grams carbohydrate, 0 grams protein, 5 grams fat, and 45 calories

Type	1 Exchange/ Serving
<b><i>Monounsaturated</i></b>	
Avocado	2 tablespoons (1 ounce)
Oil (canola, olive, peanut)	1 teaspoon
Olives	9-10 large
Peanut butter	2 teaspoons
Tahini paste	2 teaspoons
<b><i>Polyunsaturated</i></b>	
Margarine	1 teaspoon
Mayonnaise, regular	1 teaspoon
Mayonnaise, low-fat	1 tablespoon
Salad dressing, regular	1 tablespoon
<b><i>Saturated</i></b>	
Bacon, cooked	1 slice
Butter, stick	1 teaspoon
Coconut, sweetened, shredded	2 tablespoons
Cream cheese, reduced fat	1½ tablespoons
Cream cheese, regular	1 tablespoon
Cream, half and half	2 tablespoons
Shortening or lard	1 teaspoon
Sour cream, reduced fat	3 tablespoons
Sour cream, regular	2 tablespoons

Try to limit the amount of saturated fat you eat, since it is the “bad fat” that will raise your bad LDL cholesterol.

## Free Foods

One free food exchange contains less than 20 calories or 5 grams of carbohydrate per serving

**Note:** If a serving size is given, limit to three servings per day.

Type	One Exchange/Serving	Type	One Exchange/Serving
Bouillon, broth or consommé	N/A	Margarine spread, fat-free	4 tablespoons
Candy, hard, sugar free	1 candy	Mayonnaise, fat-free	1 tablespoon
Carbonated or mineral water	N/A	Mustard	N/A
Coffee	N/A	Nonstick cooking spray	N/A
Cream cheese, fat-free	1 tablespoon	Pickles, dill	1½ large
Creamers, nondairy	1 tablespoon	Salad dressing, fat-free or low-fat	1 tablespoon
Diet soft drinks, sugar-free	N/A	Salsa	¼ cup
Drink mixes, sugar-free	N/A	Soy sauce	N/A
Garlic	N/A	Spices	N/A
Gelatin dessert, sugar-free	N/A	Tabasco or hot pepper sauce	N/A
Herbs, fresh or dried	N/A	Tea	N/A
Horseradish	N/A	Vinegar	N/A
Jam or jelly, light	2 teaspoons	Whipped topping, light or fat-free	2 tablespoons
Ketchup	1 tablespoon	Wine, used in cooking	N/A
Lemon or lime juice	N/A	Worcestershire sauce	N/A

## Sweets, Desserts, and Other Carbohydrates

One exchange on this list = 15 grams carbohydrate, or 1 starch, or 1 starch, or 1 fruit, or 1 milk

Type	Serving Size	Exchanges per Serving
Angel food cake, unfrosted	1/12 cake (2 ounces)	2 carbs
Brownie, small, unfrosted	2 inch square (about 1 ounce)	1 carb, 1 fat
Cake, frosted	2 inch square (about 2 ounces)	2 carbs, 1 fat
Doughnut, plain	1 medium (1½ ounce)	1½ carbs, 2 fats
Gingersnaps	3	1 carb
Honey	1 tablespoon	1 carb
Ice cream	½ cup	1 carb, 2 fats
Ice cream, low-fat	½ cup	1½ carbs
Milk, chocolate, whole	1 cup	2 carbs, 1 fat
Pudding, sugar-free (made with low-fat milk)	½ cup	1 carb
Sports drink	8 ounces	1 carb
Sugar	1 tablespoon	1 carb
Syrup, regular	1 tablespoon	1 carb
Yogurt, frozen, low-fat	1/3 cup	1 carb, 0-1 fat

**Combination Foods**

<b>Type</b>	<b>Serving Size</b>	<b>Exchanges per Serving</b>
Chili with beans	1 cup (8 ounces)	1 carb, 2 medium fat meats
Cream soup (made with water)	1 cup (8 ounces)	1 carb, 1 fat
Lasagna	1 cup (8 ounces)	1 carb, 2 medium fat meats
Pizza, cheese, thin crust	¼ of 10 inch (5 ounces) pizza	2 carbs, 2 medium-fat meats, 1 fat
Veggie burger (soy based)	3 ounces	1 carb, 1 lean meat