



# Dispelling Food Myths

© Ingrid Balabanova

Have you heard the one about eating a high protein diet to control your blood sugar level? Dietitians face the daily challenge of dispelling myths about the foods people with diabetes should eat. For Wei Chek, senior dietitian, National Healthcare Group Polyclinics, sets the record straight on five common food myths to spell out the facts regarding the diabetic diet:

**Myth #1:** People with diabetes should consume little amount of starchy foods such as rice, noodles, bread as such foods raise blood sugar level.

**Fact:** Starchy foods such as rice, noodles and bread are the main source of carbohydrate, which is used as the first fuel for the body. There is no evidence to show that people with diabetes improve their low blood sugar control when they consume little amounts of starchy foods. If they do, especially for those who are on insulin regimen, it may predispose the risk of low blood sugar level. Indeed, they should be careful with the intake of starchy foods (total carbohydrate) for each meal. The recommended intake is five to seven servings daily.

**Myth #2:** People with diabetes should avoid eating fruits with sweet taste.

**Fact:** Fruits are rich in fibre, vitamins, minerals and antioxidants, which are beneficial to health and lower the risk of cardiovascular disease. People with diabetes should consume a variety of fruits but in moderation,

whether they are sweet or sour, because all fruits contain fructose (fruit sugar). The recommended intake is two servings daily and one serving at a time for those with diabetes. A serving of fruit can also be a healthy snack option as opposed to unhealthy choices such as potato chips, ice cream or chocolate, which are high in fat and sugar.

**Myth #3:** People with diabetes should only consume special “diabetic foods”.

**Fact:** “Diabetic foods” or foods which are “suitable for diabetics” tend to be lower in carbohydrate content, but instead have a higher fat content, which in turn does not make a significant difference in terms of calorie content compared to ordinary food products. Therefore, “diabetic” foods can only be an option, but not a necessity, for those with diabetes. They need not rely only on “diabetic foods” to improve their blood sugar control.

**Myth #4:** People with diabetes should consume a different diet from the rest of family members.

**Fact:** There is no special diet or so called “diabetic” diet for people with diabetes. Current scientific evidence shows that people with diabetes should eat what their other family members eat, provided all are having a healthy diet that is low in fat - especially saturated fats - low in salt, low in sugar and rich in fibre.

**Myth #5:** People with diabetes should consume a high protein diet to control blood sugar level.

**Fact:** People with diabetes who consume a high protein diet, especially from animal sources such as meat, fish and poultry, may end up with a higher total intake of calories because animal protein is higher in fat content naturally and because of the high fat cooking method. This may lead to further weight gain along with increased insulin resistance, resulting in poor management of diabetes. Hence, people with diabetes need not eat a high protein diet. The recommended intake per day is two to three servings.

### What is a “Serving”?

Food Group	Examples of ONE serving
Rice and Alternatives Eat 5 to 7 servings daily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>½ *bowl of rice (100g)</li> <li>½ *bowl of noodles or beehoon</li> <li>2 slices of bread (60g)</li> <li>4 pieces of cream crackers or plain biscuits (40g)</li> </ul>
Fruits Eat 2 servings daily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 small apple, orange, pear or mango (130g)</li> <li>1 wedge of papaya, watermelon or pineapple (130g)</li> <li>4 small seeds of jackfruit or rambutan (80g)</li> <li>10 grapes or longans (50g)</li> <li>6 lychees or duku (70g)</li> <li>¼ cup dried fruit (40g)</li> <li>½ cup canned fruit, drained (100g)</li> <li>1 cup of pure fruit juice (250ml)</li> </ul>
Vegetables Eat 2 servings daily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>150g raw leafy vegetables</li> <li>100g raw non-leafy vegetables</li> <li>¾ **mug cooked leafy vegetables</li> <li>¾ **mug cooked non-leafy vegetables</li> </ul>
Meat and Alternatives Eat 2 to 3 servings daily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 palm-sized portion of meat, fish or poultry (90g)</li> <li>5 medium-sized prawns</li> <li>3 whole *eggs</li> <li>2 ***glasses of milk</li> <li>2 slices of cheese (40g)</li> <li>2 small blocks soft beancurd (170g)</li> <li>¾ cup of cooked pulses (peas, beans, lentils) (120g)</li> </ul>

\* 1 bowl = 1 rice bowl

\*\* 1 mug = 250ml

\*\*\* 1 glass = 250ml

+ The protein content of three whole eggs is equivalent to other meat and alternatives, but egg yolks are high in cholesterol. Thus, eat no more than four egg yolks per week.

Source: HPB 'ABC's of Healthy Eating'

