





Dear Dietitian,

I notice that there are special diabetic foods available in the supermarkets and pharmacies, e.g. diabetic chocolates and biscuits. Will it be better for my diabetes control if I eat these special diabetic foods rather than 'normal' chocolates and biscuits?

Dear Reader.

Although special diabetic foods may contain less carbohydrate than 'normal' non-diabetic food, they usually still contain carbohydrate. Hence, they cannot be consumed freely as carbohydrates are converted to glucose, raising blood glucose levels. Moreover, sugar-free does not mean carbohydrate-free-only that the product contains less than half a gram of sugar per serving. Other forms of carbohydrate, e.g. fructose, sorbitol, maltitol, may still be present, and will raise blood glucose levels when eaten. Sugar-free products may also contain significant amounts of fats and calories, leading to weight-gain if consumed freely. You may eat ordinary chocolate and biscuits as part of your meal plan. But consult your dietitian for more advice on how to incorporate these foods into your regular diet.

Dear Dietitian,

My school schedule is very erratic, and I have to eat out often. How can I control my portions to ensure that my blood glucose and weight are under control?

Dear Reader,

It is important to inform your dietitian of any changes to your usual eating pattern so that he/she can advise you on adjusting your meal plan according to your lifestyle. As a meal plan guides you in choosing the types, quantity and timing of meals, always practise portioning out the food at home, using measuring spoons, cups or standard bowls to help train you to gauge the amount of food you are eating outside of home. It is important to remember that it is the total amount of carbohydrates in your meals and snacks that are important, not only those from sweet foods and drinks. Carbohydrate is derived from two sources: sugars and sweet foods e.g. cakes, candy, chocolates, soft drinks, etc carbohydrate-rich foods e.g. rice, bread, fruits, dairy foods, starchy vegetables (yam, potato, pumpkin, etc).

Eating out can be one of life's great pleasures as long as you make the right choices and balance your meals. If your lunch or dinner is going to be later than usual, eat a fruit or three plain biscuits at your usual mealtime to prevent low blood sugar. Similarly, if you eat more than usual, you can do some activity to burn off the extra calories and lower your blood glucose level.

Here are some tips when eating out:

Check out the serving size. If it is larger than your usual portion, share some with your dining partner, or pack the extra food.

Order foods that are not breaded or fried because they have additional fat. If the food comes breaded, skip the high-fat sauces like mayonnaise, and have a small amount of tomato or chilli sauce instead.

When ordering fast foods, resist the urge to up-size your meals. Larger portions mean more carbohydrates as well as more calories, fat, cholesterol and salt. Opt for a regular or junior-sized burger with a single meat pattie, and request for diet/sugar-free soft drinks.

These days, most endocrinologists and diabetes nurse educators recognise that children and adolescents have erratic school schedules, hence you can discuss your insulin regime with them to allow flexibility, such as the timing and amount of insulin injections. The days of rigid insulin regimes and equally rigid meal plans are over - it is possible to eat whenever you want and whatever you want (with moderation of course!).

This issue's resident dietitian is Ms Lim Siew Choo, KK Women's and Children's Hospital. Email your questions addressed to the Editor, Diabetes Singapore, Diabetic Society of Singapore.

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Of the estimated 440,000 cases of type 1 diabetes in children worldwide, more than a quarter live in South-East Asia and more than a fifth in Europe.