

'You Can't Eat Sugar' and Other Diabetes Myths

A diabetes diagnosis means you have a lot to learn about the disease - including sifting fact from fiction. Find the truths behind some common diabetes myths here.

If you assume a diabetes diagnosis means you're fated to a life full of bland foods, think again. The truth is that plenty of tasty foods have a place in your diet.

Diabetes is a complicated, often misunderstood disease. If you have it or know someone who does, there's a lot for you to learn - including sifting fact from fiction. Below are the truths behind some common diabetes myths.

Myth: People with diabetes can't eat sugar and require special "diabetic" foods.

Fact: If your blood glucose levels are under control, some sugar can be part of your diet. In fact, a diabetes diet is no different than a healthy diet. Just like people without diabetes, you should limit foods high in saturated fat, trans fat, sodium and added sugar. Your diet should be rich in whole grains, fruits, vegetables, low-fat and nonfat dairy and lean proteins.

And you probably don't need to buy special "diabetic" foods. Consider the cost and convenience of these products when making your decision.

Work with a certified diabetes educator or a registered dietician to create a nutrition plan that fits your needs.

Myth: Eating too much sugar causes diabetes.

Fact: Diabetes is not caused by eating sugar. Refined sugar that's found in foods is completely different than "blood sugar."

- Type 1 diabetes occurs when people have little or no insulin in their body.
- Type 2 diabetes occurs when your body cannot properly use the insulin it makes. In time, it is no longer able to make enough insulin to keep up.

Insulin is responsible for moving glucose from the bloodstream to the cells. If you don't have insulin, the glucose stays in the bloodstream. This is why people with diabetes have "high blood sugar."

Myth: I have diabetes, but I don't have the serious kind.

Fact: All types of diabetes - type 1, type 2 and gestational (diabetes that occurs during pregnancy) - are serious. Even if you don't have to take insulin or medication, your blood sugar levels still need to be managed. Poorly-controlled diabetes can lead to serious health problems, such as heart disease, nerve damage, kidney failure and blindness.

Myth: I can't exercise because I have diabetes.

Fact: Most people with diabetes should exercise. It is often part of a diabetes treatment program. Regular exercise helps your body use insulin better. Talk to your doctor first before you start or increase your activity.

Myth: I don't have a family history of diabetes, so I won't get it.

Fact: Plenty of people who are diagnosed with diabetes don't have a family history of the disease. And, many people with a family history of diabetes will never get it.

Having a family history of diabetes does raise your risk, though. There is nothing you can do to prevent type 1 diabetes. But, you can take steps to cut your risk of type 2 diabetes by making some changes to your lifestyle. Research shows that reducing your body weight by 5 percent to 10 percent - 10 to 20 pounds for someone who weighs 200 pounds - can cut your diabetes risk in half.

Myth: My diabetes has been "cured."

Fact: The only known "cure" for type 1 diabetes is a risky pancreas transplant surgery. There is *no* known cure for type 2 diabetes yet. Once you have diabetes, you have it forever.

Even if you don't need insulin or medication and your blood sugar levels are under control, you still have diabetes. If you stop following your diabetes treatment plan, your blood sugar levels will rise.

If you have more questions about diabetes, talk to your doctor. He or she will be able to separate fact from fiction.