



Eat Real Food

What is Real Food? It is unprocessed whole food that comes from the farm, the fishery (or sea) and the forest. Real Food does not come out of a factory with a bar code label on it.

Why eat Real Food? 4 good reasons – 1) Nutrient dense (we need a wide variety of nutrients to thrive), 2) No added sugar, 3) Naturally lower in carbohydrates (it is lower carb, not “no carb”), 4) No nasty additives.

The Low-carbohydrate, higher healthy fats diet is ideal for pre-diabetes and type two diabetes (Also good for reducing middle aged spread and may improve liver function)

This information is only part of how any particular person may decide which diet or indeed lifestyle is the best for them. If you are on prescribed medication or suffer from a significant medical condition we strongly advise you to consult your own doctor before making changes. For example improvements in lifestyle and weight loss may also significantly improve your blood pressure or diabetes control requiring a reduction in medication.

What are carbs? They can be seen as foods either containing sugars or built up from sugars, which form their building blocks. The starches in flour, potatoes, rice and other grains are examples where largely glucose is concentrated by the plant for storage. When we eat these starches the process of digestion rapidly breaks them back down into glucose.

How does insulin fit in? Why does eating carbs make you more hungry? After digestion the glucose released is rapidly absorbed into the bloodstream –the body knows that high sugar levels are toxic to it, so responds by producing the hormone insulin from the pancreas gland.

One of the functions of insulin is to cause particularly your abdominal fat cells and liver to absorb the glucose to produce fat. The resultant lower glucose level causes you to have hunger or ‘carb cravings’ and you return to the cookie jar to repeat the cycle, getting fatter in the process

Lower insulin levels as a result of reduced carb consumption is the main reason for the effectiveness of low-carb diets. Over 33 good scientific studies have shown the approach to work well. When carbs are restricted and insulin levels go down, the fat isn’t “locked” away in the fat cells anymore and becomes accessible for the body to use as energy, leading to reduced need for eating.

Also it’s quite possible for the body to become adapted to burning fat as its main fuel over several weeks. Many on the low-carb diet notice they lose belly fat first because of this. Someone with diabetes has a particular problem in metabolizing glucose so the blood sugar levels after a carby meal stay at toxic, high levels possibly damaging the small blood vessels in the eye, kidney and other organs.

It seems to make particular sense for those with Type 2 diabetes not to take in carbs given that we can live well off other foods such green veg, protein such as eggs, meat & fish, nuts and healthy fats. The weight loss that comes with the diet can help many diabetics to avoid medication altogether and feel healthier into the bargain!

The low carb diet is a lifestyle choice rather than a diet for a few weeks, because of course going back to the carbs will stimulate the insulin levels and obesity to increase again, to cause worsening diabetes.

If you stick to the accompanying diet sheet it is not usually necessary to weigh your food or calorie count.

Will a diet higher in healthy fats increase my cholesterol level? Surprisingly low carb studies often show the opposite because most of the cholesterol in your blood is manufactured from carbs in your liver and has not come from your diet at all.

So what should I eat to help control my blood sugar?

The problem with having diabetes or pre-diabetes is your metabolism can no longer deal with sugar, which becomes almost a poison; its consumption needs cutting back dramatically.

Reduce starchy carbs a lot (remember they are just concentrated sugar). If possible, cut out the bread, pasta, rice, potatoes. **Sugar – cut it out altogether**, although it will be in the blueberries, strawberries and raspberries you are allowed to eat. Cakes and biscuits are a mixture of sugar and starch that make it almost impossible to avoid food cravings; they just make you hungrier!!

Breakfast is the trickiest meal of the day for most as we are all used to toast and cereals. Eggs make a great breakfast or plain Greek yogurt with berry fruit added. Porridge oats (proper rolled oats or steel cut oats – not the instant packet oats) can be another option to vary your breakfasts. If you are not hungry, skip breakfast with just having black coffee or black tea – this extends your overnight fast and is a powerful way to get your insulin and blood sugar levels down.

All green veg/salads are fine – eat as much as you can. So that you still eat a good big dinner try substituting veg such as broccoli, courgettes or green beans for your mash, pasta or rice – still covering them with your gravy, Bolognese or curry! Tip: try home-made soup – it can be taken to work for lunch and microwaved. Mushrooms, tomatoes, and onions can be included in this.

Fruit is trickier; some tropical fruits like bananas, oranges, grapes, mangoes or pineapples have too much sugar in and can set those carb cravings off. Berries are better and are very rich in antioxidants: blueberries, raspberries, strawberries. Plums are also a good option. Small portions of apples and pears are also fine. **Never juice or smoothie your fruit** – you remove all the protective fibre and give yourself a huge fructose (sugar) boost.

Proteins such as in meat, eggs (three eggs a day is not too much), fish – particularly oily fish such as salmon, mackerel or tuna – are fine and can be eaten freely. Plain **full fat** yoghurt makes a good breakfast with the berries. Processed meats such as bacon, ham, sausages or salami are not as healthy and should only be eaten in moderation.

Fats (yes, fats can be fine in moderation): olive oil is very useful, butter may be tastier than margarine and could be better for you! Coconut oil is great for stir fries. Four essential vitamins A, D, E and K are only found in some fats or oils. Please avoid margarine, corn oil and vegetable oil. **Beware 'low fat' foods.** They often have sugar or sweeteners added to make them palatable. Full fat mayonnaise and pesto are definitely on!!

Cheese: in moderation – it's a very calorific mixture of fat, and protein.

Snacks: avoid, as habit forming. But un-salted nuts such as almonds or walnuts are OK to stave off hunger. Avoid pistachios and cashews which are very high in carbohydrates. The occasional treat of strong dark chocolate 70% or more in small quantity is allowed (aim to get to 85% if possible).

EATING LOTS OF VEG WITH PROTEIN AND HEALTHY FATS LEAVES YOU PROPERLY FULL IN A WAY THAT LASTS.

Finally, about sweeteners and what to drink – sweeteners have been proven to tease your brain into being even hungrier, making weight loss more difficult – drink tea, coffee, and water or herb teas. **Cut out all squash (including sugar free squash) and all soda (including sugar free soda like coke zero etc).** I'm afraid **alcoholic drinks are full of carbohydrate** – for example, beer is almost 'liquid toast' hence the beer belly!! Perhaps the odd glass of red wine wouldn't be too bad if it doesn't make you get hungry afterwards – or just plain water with a slice of lemon.

For some people, it can feel overwhelming making lots of big changes in one go. Work with your health care professional or health coach to start making little changes first. Little changes become big changes when we realise that we can succeed in making the little changes.

Original leaflet from Dr Unwin and adapted for the ERF programme at Aspen Medical Practice.