

Low-carb Food List for Diabetics

Adventist Vegetarian Diabetics™ recommends eating whole foods that are unprocessed (or minimally processed) and in as close as possible to their natural state.

If it comes in a can, box, bottle, jar, or bag, it is probably processed. If it has a label, it should show ingredients and nutrition information. Learn to read these labels carefully and meaningfully! Note particularly the serving size and determine how many servings you are going to have.

Search the USDA FoodData Central (<https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/>) to find information about macronutrients and micronutrients of the foods shown in this list.

Vegetables

Low-carb, non-starchy vegetables should be the foundation of *any* diabetic's dietary protocol!

- Alfalfa sprouts
- Arugula (rocket)
- Artichokes
- Asparagus
- Baby corn (NOT mature corn!)
- Bamboo shoots
- Bean sprouts
- Bok choy
- Broccoli
- Brussels sprouts
- Cabbage (all varieties)
- Cauliflower
- Celery
- Celeriac (celery root)
- Chayote
- Chicory greens
- Cucumber
- Eggplant (aubergine)
- Endive
- Fennel
- Garlic
- Green beans (string beans)

- Greens (all varieties, including beet, chard, collards, kale, mustard, spinach, and turnip)
- Jicama
- Leeks
- Lettuce (all varieties)
- Mushrooms
- Okra
- Onions
- Parsley
- Peppers
- Pumpkin
- Radicchio
- Radishes
- Rutabaga (swede)
- Scallions (spring onions)
- Shallots
- Snow peas (sugar snap peas)
- Spaghetti squash
- Spinach
- Summer squash
- Tomatoes
- Turnips
- Watercress
- Wax beans
- Zucchini (courgette)

Avoid starchy vegetables, such as potatoes (all varieties), winter squash, parsnips, etc. Use carrots and beets as garnishes rather than a whole side dish. Some may find that tomatoes and onions spike their blood sugar if used in too great a quantity.

Fruit

The best fruits for diabetics are avocados and olives! Next would be most berries, with their anti-oxidant properties and low-carb, to boot! With these and the other fruits listed here, portion size is critical.

- Avocado
- Black raspberries
- Blackberries
- Blueberries
- Cranberries, unsweetened
- Grapefruit (half)
- Lemon

- Lime
- Olives
- Raspberries
- Rhubarb, unsweetened
- Strawberries

“Clean” Meat/Poultry/Fish

[Omit this section if you are vegetarian/vegan]

We suggest **organic, grass-fed meats** and **cage-free, pasture-raised** poultry. If you eat processed meat, such as beef, chicken, or turkey bacon, beef salami, beef pepperoni, beef, chicken, or turkey hot dogs, etc., try to get a brand/variety that is **uncured** (does not contain nitrites/nitrates).

- Beef
- Chicken
- Duck*
- Goose*
- Lamb
- Quail
- Turkey
- Veal

*Duck and goose are traditionally not eaten by Seventh-day Adventists, although they are permitted in Judaism.

We suggest **wild-caught fish** (not farmed).

- Anchovies
- Bass
- Cod
- Flounder
- Haddock
- Halibut
- Perch
- Pollock
- Salmon
- Sardines
- Snapper
- Trout
- Tuna
- Whitefish

If you buy canned fish or meat, be sure to read the label for ingredients. Choose a brand/variety that contains just the meat/fish and water or olive oil.

Dairy

[Omit this section if you are vegan, ovo-vegetarian, or lactose-intolerant]

Dairy milk is too high in sugar (lactose) for diabetics. However, we can eat dairy products, such as:

- Butter*
- Cheeses, natural**
- Cottage cheese (full-fat)
- Cream (heavy whipping cream)
- Cream cheese
- Kefir (plain, unsweetened, homemade is best)
- Sour cream
- Yogurt, plain (especially whole milk Greek yogurt. Our favorite brands are unsweetened Siggi and Total Fage 5%.)

*Vegans can buy vegan butter, usually made with coconut oil.

**Note that not all cheeses are vegetarian. For example, Parmesan cheese is always made with animal rennet.

We **avoid dairy products labeled low-fat or fat-free**, because typically when the producer takes out the fat, they add sugar to make it taste better! And totally avoid processed cheese-like products, such as Velveeta, Kraft Singles, CheezWiz, etc.

Eggs

[Omit this section if you are vegan or lacto-vegetarian.]

We recommend eggs from **cage-free pasture-raised** poultry. Eat the whole egg, not just the whites!

Healthy Fats

- Avocado oil
- Butter*
- Coconut oil
- Extra virgin olive oil (in amber glass bottles)
- Ghee (clarified butter)

*Vegans can buy vegan butter, usually made with coconut oil.

Avoid margarine, shortening, and vegetable oils (including canola, corn, cottonseed, grapeseed, safflower, soybean, sunflower).

Grains (and grain-based foods)

Most grains (including whole grains) and cereals are too high in carbohydrates for diabetics. This includes breads, rice, oatmeal, Cream of Wheat, pasta (all varieties), cakes, bagels, doughnuts, etc. You can:

- Make breads and cakes with almond flour and coconut flour
- Make or buy cauliflower rice
- Make zucchini noodles (spiralizing)

- Buy shirataki noodles
- Make hot and cold cereals with nuts, seeds, and coconut

Legumes

Most legumes are too high in carbohydrates for diabetics. The lowest carb legumes are:

- Soybeans (including black soy beans, but NOT black beans!)
- Edamame (green soybeans)
- Peanuts
- Green peas
- Garbanzos
- Lentils

Nuts & Seeds

Nuts

- Almonds
- Brazil nuts (NOTE: limit to 3 at a time)
- Hazelnuts
- Macadamia nuts
- Pecans
- Pili nuts
- Pine nuts
- Walnuts

Note: Peanuts are a legume, not a nut

Seeds

- Chia seeds
- Flaxseeds, whole or ground
- Hemp hearts
- Poppy seeds
- Pumpkin seeds
- Sesame seeds
- Sunflower seeds

Beverages

The best beverage is plain water! However, you can:

- Infuse water with lemons, limes, cucumbers, strawberries, etc.
- Drink seltzer water or sparkling water (unsweetened)
- Drink club soda

- Chill your water (or add ice cubes) – Sip, rather than swig, cold water. Do not drink ice water with meals.

Here are our recommendations if you drink:

- **Soda** – Most sodas, including most diet sodas, are not good choices. Both are linked with kidney failure. Put a squeeze of lemon or lime in seltzer water. Or, look for Zevia (brand) sodas, which are sweetened with stevia.
- **Smoothies** – Most smoothies are fruit-based. These have far too many carbs for diabetics. Look for recipes that use avocado or unsweetened nut milks and a small amount of nut butter.
- **Juices** – No fruit or vegetable juices or fruit drinks. NONE.
- **Coffee or tea** – Black or with heavy cream or unsweetened coconut cream is ideal. Some people like “bulletproof” coffee or tea with coconut oil and/or butter. Others have had spikes from black coffee. Note: Coffee alternatives, like Postum or Pero, are typically too high in carbs.
- **Alcohol** – We suggest that you skip alcoholic drinks for a month, while you learn to eat low-carb. After that, test low-carb options like champagne, red wine, or dry white wine. Spirits like whiskey, gin, tequila, rum, and vodka are free of carbs. Drink straight or add a low-carb mixer. Avoid beer, juices, or sweet drinks. Strict portion control of alcoholic drinks is required.

Sweeteners

Sugar

Eliminate sugar in all its forms! This includes agave, white sugar, brown sugar, raw sugar, coconut sugar, date sugar, corn syrup/high fructose corn syrup, honey, maple syrup, molasses, dextrose, maltodextrin, etc.

Artificial Sweeteners

All artificial sweeteners are less than ideal. However, they do have a place in:

- Cooking and baking for a special occasion, sweet foods that are not eaten frequently
- The beginning of a low-carb no-sugar dietary protocol, as a transition food

These are the major artificial sweeteners that diabetics use:

- **Acesulfate potassium** – common in diet sodas. Contains methylene chloride. This chemical can harm kidneys. It can cause headaches, depression, nausea, and mental confusion.
- **Allulose** – Found in wheat and some fruit. Not metabolized. Good for baking, but pricey.
- **Aspartame** (*Equal*, *Nutrasweet*) – May cause obesity by killing good gut bacteria. Is a trigger for migraines in some people.
- **Monkfruit** – Comes from an Asian plant. May have antioxidant effects. Does spike some people’s blood sugar.
- **Stevia** – Comes from a plant. As a powder, it can have a very bitter aftertaste. Liquid forms tend to taste much better and they come in flavors. Stevia is heat stable and can be used in baking.
- **Sucralose** (*Splenda*) – Like aspartame, this can kill good gut bacteria and cause obesity.
- **Sugar alcohols** – end in “itol”, such as erythritol, sorbitol, maltitol, and xylitol. These can cause bloating and GI upset. May have a “cooling” effect that does not work in some recipes. Maltitol

is not a good choice for those with blood sugar issues. **Xylitol can kill dogs, even in small amounts.**

Be wary of artificial sweeteners offered in individual packets in restaurants and fast food places. Read the labels! Very often the first ingredient is a form of sugar, with only a small amount of the sweetener on the label.

What About Foods Not on This List?

Search the **USDA FoodData Central** (<https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/>) to find information about macronutrients and micronutrients of the foods shown in (or not shown in) this list.

Then “eat to your meter.” Make a list of all your “safe” foods.

Here’s how to test to “eat to your meter”:

1. **Baseline:** Test pre-meal to get a fasting baseline. Ideally, a non-diabetic normal is 70-99 mg/dL (or 3.8-5.6 mmol/l). If it’s higher than that, it’s okay—for now. Just write it down.
2. **Blood sugar peak:** Test one (1) hour after taking the first bite of your meal because that’s when blood sugar typically peaks. If you are clearly diabetic, it may not peak until 90 minutes after the start of your meal. If your blood sugar raises over 20-30 mg/dL (or over 1.4-2.0 mmol/l), that’s a red flag that the food being tested may not be a suitable one to include in your diet.
3. **Blood sugar normalization:** Test two (2) to three (3) hours after taking the first bite of your meal, as that is when your blood sugar should come back down to close to your pre-meal number. If it does not, keep testing!
4. **Delayed blood sugar peak and normalization:** If your meal is high in fiber (such as whole grains and legumes) or if it is high in protein of any kind, test again at four (4), five (5), or even six (6) hours after said meal, because high-fiber high-protein meals typically take longer to digest and may cause your blood sugar to remain high for several hours after the meal.
5. **Repeat this testing process** for a specific food several times on different days. Make sure the rest of the content of the meal stays consistent. Keep accurate records with dates and test results.

NOTES: