

Control your diabetes *For Life:*

Circular 631 C

What About Sweets?

NUTRITION SERIES

- Sugar and sweetened foods have the same effect on blood sugar as other high-carbohydrate foods.
- Sugar and sweets can be part of a healthy diet if you take care not to let them replace nutrient-rich carbohydrate foods like whole grains, fruits, beans and milk.
- Many delicious desserts can be made using fresh fruits and other nutritious ingredients.
- Artificial sweeteners can add sweetness to desserts while adding few or no calories or grams of carbohydrate.
- Remember that fruit desserts—as well as those made with artificial sweeteners—may still contain high levels of carbohydrate. This is because they contain other high-carbohydrate ingredients, such as flour and milk.
- Reading a nutrition label helps in deciding how much of a sweet food to eat. Remember that 15 grams of carbohydrates equal one serving of a carbohydrate food.
- Go ahead and enjoy an occasional sweet. Moderation and balance are the keys to fitting the foods you love into your overall diet.

In times past, people with diabetes were told that they couldn't eat sugar or sweet foods. But what about fruit or milk, foods that contain naturally occurring sugars? If it had been true that people with diabetes simply couldn't eat sugar, they also would have had to forgo fruit and milk.



Now we understand that sugar and sweetened foods have the same effect on blood sugar levels as other high-carbohydrate foods (such as starches, milk and fruit), when we compare equivalent amounts of these foods in terms of the carbohydrates they contain. The key is to control the total carbohydrate intake. Many delicious desserts can be made using fresh fruits and other nutritious ingredients. Artificial sweeteners can be used to add sweetness to desserts while adding few or no calories.

Many sweet foods (such as cakes, cookies and candies) do not contain nutrients that the body needs. Even if you balance your carbohydrate intake using the 50/50 Method (see Circular 631A, *Choosing Foods at Meals and Snacks*, in the *Control Your Diabetes for Life* series) it's not a good idea to eat large amounts of these foods. If you do, it's likely that you'll end up eating fewer portions of grains, fruits and milk on a daily basis. Sugar and sweets can fit into a healthy diet occasionally. However, they should not replace nutrient-rich carbohydrate foods like whole grains, fruits, beans and milk.

One solution is to eat fruit for dessert, either alone or incorporated into recipes. While fruit is high in carbohydrate, it also contains vitamins, minerals and fiber. If you choose canned fruit, look for the kind packed in light syrup or fruit juice. These types have less sugar than fruits packed in heavy syrup. If canned fruit in heavy syrup is the only type available, drain off the syrup and rinse the fruit before eating it.

A second strategy is using sugar substitutes, which lend a sweet taste to foods without adding many calories or grams of carbohydrate. Remember that sugar is more than a sweetener. In addition to sweetening a recipe, sugar makes baked products tender and moist. It gives a golden brown color to baked desserts and breads. It also gives volume to cakes and cookies. To avoid disappointing results, start by replacing only part of the sugar with artificial sweeteners. Keep in mind that most sugar substitutes are much sweeter than sugar; be careful to find out a product's sugar equivalency by reading the food label. Recipes that usually do well with sugar substitutes are beverages, frozen desserts, pie fillings, sauces, gelatins and puddings. You can look for artificial sweetener recipes on product containers, request them from the company or search for them online.



College of Agriculture
and Home Economics
Cooperative Extension Service

Karen Halderson, MPH, RD, LD, CDE
Extension Diabetes Coordinator

Martha Archuleta, PhD, RD
Extension Food and Nutrition Specialist

There are four categories of sugar substitutes, which are also called non-nutritive sweeteners:

Saccharin

Saccharin sweeteners are very stable for baking, but leave a bad aftertaste when used in large amounts. Sweet n' Low, Sweet Twin and Sugar Twin are saccharin-based sweeteners. **Women are advised not to consume saccharin during pregnancy.**

Aspartame

Aspartame has very little aftertaste, but it loses its sweet taste when heated. Equal, Nutrasweet and Natratate are aspartame-based sweeteners.

Acesulfame potassium

Acesulfame potassium is more stable when heated than aspartame and has less aftertaste than saccharin. Sweet One, Swiss Sweet and DiabetiSweet are acesulfame potassium-based sweeteners.

Sucralose

Sucralose is an artificial sweetener that is made from sugar that has undergone certain chemical changes. It has the same volume and taste as sugar and it is stable when heated to high temperatures. Splenda and Altern are sucralose-based sweeteners.

These four substances were tested for years before manufacturers were permitted to add them to foods. They have been determined by the Food and Drug Administration to be safe for human consumption. One exception is people who are born with a very rare condition called phenylketonuria. These people cannot metabolize foods that contain large amounts of phenylalanine, one of the ingredients in aspartame. They need to avoid aspartame as well as many other foods.

Look for information about food safety from reliable sources, such as the American Dietetics Association (www.eatright.org), the American Diabetes Association (www.diabetes.org), and the American Association of Diabetes Educators (www.aadenet.org).

If you choose to use artificial sweeteners the following Web sites have recipes and other information.

www.sweetnlow.com

www.nutrasweet.com

www.natratate.com

www.sweetone.com

www.splenda.com

www.equal.com

www.diabeticproducts.com/pages/products_sweet.htm

Reading a nutrition label helps with decisions about how much of a sweet food to eat. Remember that 15 grams of carbohydrates is considered 1 serving of a carbohydrate food. If a serving of dessert contains 45 grams of carbohydrates, it counts as 3 carbohydrate servings. Depending on how many servings of carbohydrates you are allotted at a meal, dessert could use up your total carbohydrate "allowance." In this case, you might want to eat less than a serving. Remember that many fruit desserts, as well as those made with artificial sweeteners, still contain high levels of carbohydrate. This is because they also contain other high-carbohydrate ingredients, such as flour and milk.

Go ahead and enjoy an occasional sweet. As with all high-carbohydrate foods, moderation and balance are the keys to fitting the foods you love into your overall diet.

Where to go for more information

- Your health care provider
- American Diabetes Association:
1-800-DIABETES
www.diabetes.org
- National Diabetes Education Program:
1-800-438-5383
or visit the World Wide Web at ndep.nih.gov or www.cdc.gov
- New Mexico Diabetes Prevention and Control Program
www.diabetesnm.org
- Your county Extension office

This publication was made possible by grants from New Mexico State University's Cooperative Extension Service and the Diabetes Prevention and Control Program.

New Mexico State University is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer and educator. NMSU and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating.

January 2008

Las Cruces, NM

This publication is scheduled to be updated and reissued January 2013.