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How to Shop Smart

One of the biggest challenges a person with diabetes may face is grocery shopping. There are many temptations at the grocery store, from ice cream to cakes to cookies, but there are ways to shop smart to help keep blood sugar under control.

Donna Anderson, project coordinator at Quality Insights of Pennsylvania and a former diabetes educator, advises, “Try not to shop when hungry, and avoid food aisles with unhealthy food choices. It is always a good idea to prepare a list to assist you with selection when grocery shopping.”

Barbara Rigney, a registered dietician and licensed dietician nutritionist, agrees. She also stresses the importance of looking at food labels. “When [diabetics] look at nutrition labels, they need to look at total carbohydrate content and foods that are higher in fiber.”

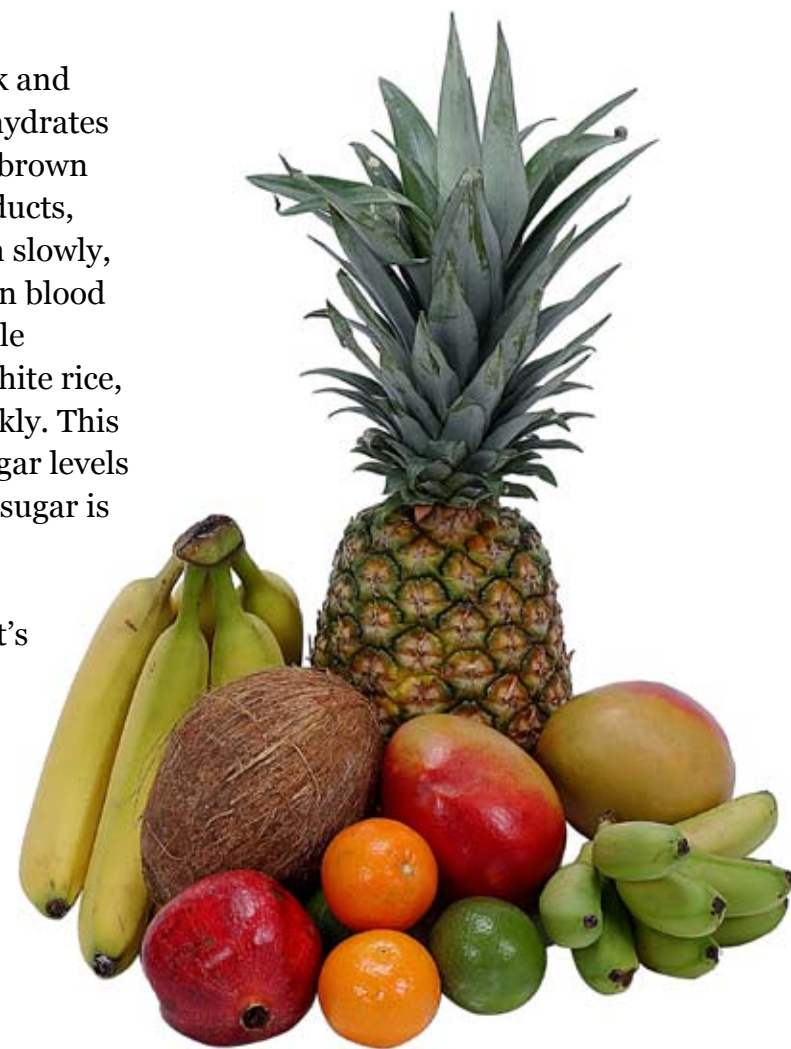
It can be confusing trying to understand the difference between carbohydrates and sugars. Donna explains, “Carbohydrates are merely different forms of sugars linked together. Carbohydrates break down into glucose, which is the primary fuel the body needs to keep it functioning at its optimum level. Carbohydrates are found in starches, fruits, non-

starchy vegetables, sweets, milk and milk products. Complex carbohydrates such as green leafy vegetables, brown rice, potatoes, whole grain products, legumes, and fruits break down slowly, causing a gradual rise and fall in blood sugar. On the other hand, simple carbohydrates such as cakes, white rice, and ice cream break down quickly. This causes rapid spikes in blood sugar levels and subsequent lows when the sugar is absorbed.”


When reading food labels, what’s most important is the total carbohydrate content. Many foods are labeled “sugar free,” but this does not mean that they are free of carbohydrates. According to Barbara, “sugar free” food items may not have less total carbohydrates than regular food items because they still contain flour. The rule of thumb for total carbohydrate consumption, says Barbara, “is between 45-60 grams of carbohydrates per meal, including breakfast, lunch, and dinner. A suitable snack would include 15 grams of carbohydrates.”

Snacking, especially after dinner, can be a problem. Barbara and Donna both suggest an evening snack that includes carbohydrates and protein, like crackers with peanut butter, or crackers or fruit with cheese, if cholesterol is not a problem. A little bit of protein and about 15 grams of carbohydrates are ideal.

Although fresh fruit and vegetables do not come with nutrition labels,



it’s important to count them in your daily carbohydrate intake. “Generally a small piece of fruit has one serving of carbohydrates – about 15 grams,” Barbara explains. There are many resources you can use to figure out how many carbohydrates are in foods. The Internet can direct you to diabetes Web sites. There are also many books on the subject.

To learn more about food and diabetes, one great resource is the American Diabetes Association’s Web site, www.diabetes.org, which offers information on reading food labels, meal planning, recipes and more. 

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