

Rise and Shine With A Diabetes-Friendly Breakfast

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October 11 2023 11:48 AM



Picky eaters are sometimes described as chowing down from a limited menu. For people with diabetes, a limited menu may be the norm to keep the condition at bay. That may make choosing food for breakfast seem difficult. But there are options when you have time or when you're on the go.

The “yes” column

“We really stress that people with diabetes should get a lean protein in their meal,” says Jalinn Nobis-Wichman, RN, BSN, a diabetes educator with OSF HealthCare. “That helps maintain your blood sugars at a more constant level for a longer time.”

Your breakfast should also include a moderate level (15 to 30 grams) of carbohydrates, she says.

Some items that fit the bill: chicken, eggs, tofu scrambles, lean turkey bacon or sausage and Greek yogurt. Leftovers from last night’s dinner, if they are diabetes-friendly, are also fair game.

If you’re pressed for time and hitting the road, Nobis-Wichman says an English muffin from the drive-thru is okay. Just don’t make it a daily habit.

The “no” column

What about foods to avoid? It’s painful to hear, but Nobis-Wichman says many typical breakfast morsels aren’t the best for people with diabetes. Pancakes and waffles are chief among them. They are high in carbohydrates, and syrup only makes the carbs go higher.

“Cereals are a whole grain, but they are hard for people with diabetes because they’re pretty processed,” Nobis-Wichman lists as another food to avoid. “You tend to burn through that energy rather quickly.”

That’s just one of the reasons not to throw caution to the wind and munch on pancakes and cereal most mornings.

“You’d be starting your day off rough,” Nobis-Wichman says bluntly.

“You’re starting the day with high blood sugar. Nine times out of 10, you’ll probably be high the rest of the day even if you eat right,” she adds. Sustained high blood sugar can have serious health consequences.

Avoid skipping breakfast or any meal, Nobis-Wichman says. And she says the low-carbohydrate ketogenic diet (commonly known as keto) is not recommended for people with diabetes.

Take time to plan

People embarking on a diet will often meal prep, planning out meals for days at a time. People with diabetes can, too, and it's arguably one of the most important things to do to maintain your health.

“You have to live with this disease for the rest of your life. So, I will never tell anybody they absolutely cannot have a certain food,” Nobis-Wichman says. “You just have to do it very wisely. Pick and choose how much, when and with what.

“That’s the hard part about diabetes,” she adds. “You always have to be thinking about what you’re taking in.”

Key takeaways:

- **A lean protein and food with a moderate level of carbohydrates are good breakfast options for people with diabetes.**
- **High carbohydrate and processed food are ones to avoid.**
- **Meal planning can help you stay healthy and eat food that will keep diabetes in check.**