



Using *Beyond the Basics*

Meal Planning Resource for People Living with Diabetes

Background:

Beyond the Basics is one of Diabetes Canada's most used resources. It is a meal planning and carb counting tool for all people living with diabetes. While it is intended to provide help with planning healthy meals, it is also to help people living with diabetes plan the quality, quantity and timing of carbohydrate intake so that it is consistent over time. It was last updated in 2018.

A team of 10 volunteer health care professionals (HCPs) working in private practice, critical care, family health teams and diabetes clinic settings provided input and direction into three revisions of the now updated resource. IN addition to the HCP committee, 12 people living with diabetes reviewed and provided input as well as Diabetes Canada staff on our Knowledge & Connection, Healthcare Professional Education & Engagement and Information & Referral teams.

The process included input and review of 3 versions along with one final review using AI to check for clarity of message, literacy and language level, grammar and spelling.

What's Changed:

- **Format:** changed format from poster to printable 8.5"x11" page size. The resource will be offered free to download or available to purchase as a 4-page double-sided colour booklet through ShopDC on our website.
- **Serving sizes:** updated to reflect 2024 Canadian Nutrient File and individual product packaging for those foods that contain carbohydrates. Serving sizes have been removed from those foods that do not contain carbohydrate as a reflection of Canada's Food Guide format and our balanced plate model.
- **Symbols:** colour coding for Choose More Often, Choose Less Often was replaced with just a symbol and footnote to choose less often to accommodate printing in black and white.
- **Food groupings:** included a wider variety of food groupings.
- **Cultural foods:** to reflect the diverse Canadian population.
- **Additional items:** added snacks, sweets and some prepared foods reflective of common eating patterns, choices and need for people with diabetes to learn how to fit these foods into their usual eating pattern.

Helpful Hints

Beyond the Basics is Diabetes Canada's meal planning guide. This guide has several features:

- *Food items reflect common items, across cultures, that are consumed regularly in Canada.*
- *'Choose-less often' items are based on nutrient density and current thinking on heart health, glycemic index and carbohydrate counting. They are marked with this symbol ▼*
- *Portions of "Carbohydrate containing foods" are consistent with the amount providing as close to 15 g **net** carbohydrate as possible.*
- *Portions of "Foods containing little to no carbohydrate" are consistent with standard consumption patterns and Canada's Food Guide.*
- *Beyond the Basics makes it easier for individuals to understand and educators to teach how to include a variety of foods at mealtimes while keeping carbohydrate consistent throughout the day and from day to day.*
- *Beyond the Basics can be used as a progression from 'Getting Started: healthy eating and diabetes' or on its own to help with meal planning.*

It is only one of many methods for teaching meal planning and the tool itself allows flexibility in the teaching of meal planning concepts. The primary target audience for this resource are adults living with diabetes and practicing carbohydrate counting as part of their blood sugar management.

Other information available on diabetes.ca to support nutrition and meal planning include:

- *Getting Started: healthy eating and diabetes*
- *The Glycemic Index Food Guide*
- *Basic Carbohydrate Counting*
- *Reading Labels*
- *Handy Portion Guide*
- *Facts on Fibre*
- *Protein & Diabetes*
- *Healthy Snacking*
- *Build a Balanced Snack*
- *Build a Balanced Breakfast*

A Few Reminders

1. *The nutrient content information for Beyond the Basics was obtained from the Canadian Nutrient File, 2024 and individual product packaging where needed.*
2. *All foods containing carbohydrate (CHO) have been evaluated to provide approximately 15 g of available (net) CHO per serving. Available (net) carbohydrate is the carbohydrate that remains after the dietary fibre has been subtracted.*
3. *Cultural foods are included to reflect Canada's multicultural population and Canadians' love of diverse cuisines.*
4. *Although consumers can select all their recommended portions of CHO according to their own preferences and cultural background, educators are encouraged to reinforce healthy eating habits that include choosing a variety of foods from all groups and help individuals understand how to fit their favourite and culturally specific foods into a healthy eating pattern.*
5. *Food groups are named to accurately reflect foods included in each group. Items which do not obviously seem to belong in a specific food group have been placed according to their most common usage.*
6. *Foods with the 'Choose less often' symbol ▼ should be chosen less often due to generally being higher fat, higher sugar or higher GI values.*
7. *Blank space has been provided in each food group to allow for the addition of commonly eaten foods.*
8. *Most vegetables are classified as "free" to encourage consumption of vegetables for their nutritional benefits. Vegetables such as carrots, green peas, parsnips, turnips and beets have less available carbohydrate than popularly believed because of the large amount of fibre. When consumed in ½ cup or less servings, they are considered free. Consumers who eat these vegetables in larger amounts should be taught how to account for carbohydrates.*
9. *Snacks and Sweets have been included. The 2018 Clinical Practice Guidelines state that up to 10% of daily calories may be consumed as sugar without causing a deleterious effect on glycemic or lipid control. Individuals should be taught how to include these foods into their healthy eating pattern.*

Teaching Tips

1. *Remind individuals that the product food label, where applicable, is the most accurate source of nutrition information. Food labels can be used to estimate the size of one carbohydrate choice. As noted, dietary fibre and sugar alcohols (if applicable) should be subtracted to determine available carbohydrate. For more information, see the Nutrition Facts table area in Beyond the Basics.*

2. *Beyond the Basics* uses common household measures (eg. 1/2 cup) to identify portion sizes thus carbohydrate content is approximate. Those individuals requiring more information should be taught to read food labels, use resource books and count exact grams of carbohydrate. Occasionally, measuring foods can be helpful. While we recognize that Canada uses the metric system, the majority of household measure and package information remain in Imperial so due to space limitations we've included Imperial measures with only a few metric measure where applicable.
3. *The Handy Portion Guide* and the plate method are useful guides for some individuals. Many people (e.g. those on insulin) will require a more exact measure.
4. Teaching the concept of Glycemic Index can make a difference to health outcomes. Add information about combining high/low glycemic foods to reduce blood sugar response and mixing protein/fat to balance high GI foods. Cultural norms that include lower GI foods should be respected and teaching portion and tactics to reduce glycemic load should be discussed.
5. *Foods Containing Little to No Carbohydrates*: We have left serving sizes out of this area. You can use a combination of the *Handy Portion Guide*, recommended serving sizes or discuss specifically the difference in protein content of different foods depending on your client's needs.

Given the guidelines for half meal as non-starchy vegetables, ¼ meal carbohydrate and ¼ meal protein, we have included several examples as to how to fill in the meal planner below.

Time/M meal	Breakfast	Snack	Lunch	Snack	Dinner	Snack
Carbohydrate containing foods (number of 15 gram servings)						
Grains/Starches	2		2		2	1
Fruits	1		1	1		
Milk & Alt	1				1	1
Other						
Foods containing little to no carbohydrates						
Vegetables			½ plate		½ plate	
Proteins	¼ plate		¼ plate	1	¼ plate	
Fats	2 tsp		1 Tbsp		1 Tbsp	