



# 12 WORST FOODS

## FOR DIABETES



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Diabetes in the United States is growing at an alarming rate, affecting more than 29 **million Americans, based on current estimates (1)**. That's around **10 percent of the** whole country. While medication helps, one of the best ways to treat (or prevent) this disease is to learn which foods to avoid with [diabetes](#).

**It's about more than controlling your blood sugar by avoiding sweets. You need to** educate yourself about foods with hidden sugars, artificial ingredients, and processed foods. For those with gestational diabetes, adhering to a diabetic diet is even more important.

## 1. Coffee Creamers

The Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH) released a study that found coffee drinkers have a significantly lowered risk of type 2 diabetes (2). Great news, right? **There was one catch: coffee is super healthy, as long as it's not loaded with sugary creamers.**

Among the many foods to avoid with diabetes, coffee creamer is likely an afterthought. **You don't use that much, after** all. But they are usually loaded with sugar and artificial flavorings that are even worse than sugar (3).

Unfortunately, your favorite coffee add-in is most likely laced with nasty artificial sweeteners and corn syrup(4). Non-dairy creamers are the worst offenders – have you ever read the ingredients label on one? \*gag\*



The good news is that there are some **healthier options available if you just can't** stomach black coffee (5 ). Real cream, cinnamon, vanilla, coconut creams, and natural **sweeteners like honey (sparingly) or stevia are all better options**. Chances are you'll find a combination that tastes better than your beloved creamer!

## 2. Processed Lunch Meat



Your doctor probably recommended that you get more protein in your diet – and you should. But processed lunch meats are NOT the answer. Full of fillers, flavoring agents, **sodium, preservatives, and toxic chemicals**, it's hard to label them as food at all (6).

In fact, the HSPH found that regularly consuming processed meats increases the risk of **heart disease by more than 40% (7)**. However, that wasn't the biggest surprise: it also raised participant's risk of type 2 diabetes by nearly 20%! Consuming 50g of these "meat" products (the equivalent of one hot dog) per day actually increases the risk of diabetes by more than 50%.

Stick to organic meats, seafood, and vegetable proteins that require some level of preparation (8). Cook and refrigerate your meals ahead of **time so you don't find** yourself reaching for unhealthy options in a hurry. For those times when you are in a bit of a crunch, there are healthy jerky and other to-go protein options (9).



### 3. Frozen Meals



Flash-frozen fruits and vegetables definitely have benefits, when done right. It allows you to enjoy the full nutritional benefits year-round without worrying about expiration dates or preservatives (10). Frozen meals, however, are a completely different story.

**Microwaving food doesn't exactly do much to keep food appetizing. To make up for it,** manufacturers have to add some pretty unnatural ingredients (11). The average frozen dinner contains more sodium, fat, and preservatives than one person should consume in a day. Anything with a sauce – even gravy – is bound to be full of glucose-raising carbs (12).

#### 4. Soft Drinks



There are few food or drink items that contain as much sugar in as small of a package **as soda (13 )**. **It's basically liquid sugar with an average of around 39 grams in a single 12 oz can (14)**. Considering that the American Heart Association (AHA) recommends **no more than 38 grams per day for an adult male, it's bad news all around**.

Studies show that drinking two of these sugar bombs a day doubles your risk of diabetes (15). Thinking of switching to diet? The same study found that drinking diet **soda didn't make a** difference in risk levels. The artificial sweeteners in diet soda products are just as bad for you in the long run (13 ).

It is important to note that the correlation with diet soda and diabetes is not the same as causation (16). Switching to diet soda is a great way to reduce your sugar intake while you work to quit your soft drink habit. It is NOT a pass for you to increase your sugar intake through other sweet products – which is what researchers found most people were doing.

If you cant give up soda right away, then switch to diet in the short term ONLY. Drink naturally flavored carbonated beverages (think La Croix) or add a squeeze of lemon juice or FDA-approved essential oils to your water. Better yet: switch to tea (17 )!

## 5. Commercial Fruit Juice



There's a reason fruit juice isn't mentioned as an option to soda: it's almost as bad as soda (18). Especially for diabetics.

In its whole form, fruit still contains sugar – but it also contains fiber (19). Fiber lowers **your body's glycemic response by slowing digestion, as well as keeping you full.** Juicing removes the fiber, leaving you with nicely-flavored sugar water. Commercial fruit juices take this one step further and actually ADD sugar to make the juice sweeter! Subsequently, research studies now confirm that regular consumption of fruit juice increases your risk of type 2 diabetes (20).

Homemade fruit juice **is just slightly better: the fiber is still gone, but there's no added sugar** (unless you add it yourself). The good news is that eating whole fruit is associated with a lower risk of diabetes. Whole fruit are loaded with micronutrients, antioxidants, and vitamins, in addition to the fiber (21 ).

**If you're not in the mood to munch on whole fruit, then give smoothies a go (22).** You'll keep the fiber, and there are endless, delicious combinations to come up with (23 ). To really keep your glycemic index low, add some more fiber to your smoothies with some flaxseed, chia seeds, or spinach.



## 6. Fried Foods



**Fried foods are bad for you even if you don't have diabetes. They're really, really bad for you if you do. Why?**

Studies show that trans fats – like the oils used for frying – may actually promote insulin resistance (24, 25).

Regular consumption of trans fatty foods already shares a solid link with cardiovascular disease, which also puts you at higher risk for metabolic syndrome and diabetes (26).

Familiarize yourself with the different types of trans fats companies use in processed food, and always read the nutritional content label (27).

Due to their low cost and ease of use, trans fats are a restaurant favorite. You may want to ask your waiter what oil the restaurant uses, and opt for healthier menu options.

## 7. Vitamin Water



Vitamin water was, and is, a huge hit in the drink industry. Yummy, flavored drinks with vitamins? They must be healthy! However, when Coca Cola was sued for making unfounded health claims about their Vitaminwater product, their lawyers had an **unbelievable defense**. They asserted that “no consumer could reasonably be misled into thinking vitaminwater was a healthy beverage” (28). Apparently their definition of “vitamin” isn’t the same as the rest of the world...

This is where label-reading comes in. Even though a product is labeled with healthy-sounding words or phrases, **nutritional content doesn’t lie** (29). Vitaminwater and products like it are usually sugar water with a dash of synthetic vitamins and a lot of artificial flavoring. In fact, one bottle of vitaminwater has almost as much carbohydrates as a bottle of soda (30 ).

Coca Cola and other companies count on consumers to not read the nutritional labels. If **they did, then their claim about no consumer being reasonably “misled” would hold true** across the board. Stick to water, tea, and reach for a piece of fruit if you get a sweet craving.



## 8. White Bread and Pasta



As mentioned earlier, the ingestion of carbohydrates raises blood glucose levels (31). Fiber helps to prevent blood sugar from spiking and reduces the insulin response. For diabetics – especially type 2 diabetics – this is very important (32).

Most white breads and pastas have processed out most of the fiber and nutrients from **the grain (33)**. This removes the majority of the bread's nutritional value and increases the glycemic index (34). Try replacing your white bread and pastas with **"100 percent whole grain" or "100 percent whole wheat" versions**. Additionally, try to limit your starchy carb intake (like breads and pastas) to 25 percent or less of your daily calories (35).

## 9. Flavored Yogurt



Studies show that people who eat yogurt regularly have a lower risk of developing **diabetes than those who don't (36)**. **This is largely due to the probiotics in yogurt that** help keep your gut healthy and happy (37 ). As you may have guessed, there is a catch: not all yogurts are created equal. The average store-bought flavored yogurt can contain as much as 27 grams of sugar in a single serving! Make your own flavored yogurt with unsweetened Greek yogurt (high in protein!) and your own add-ins. Fresh fruit, no-sugar-added granola, toasted nuts, cacao nibs, local honey, and cinnamon are a good starting point (38). Play around with it and make your own personal concoction (39). Aim for 4-5 servings of yogurt per week for the most benefits (40).

## 10. Breakfast Cereal and Granola Bars



Cereals are the typical American go-to breakfast, which is unfortunate because most of them are so, so bad for you (41)! Even though eating cereal as a child was linked to an increased risk of diabetes over a decade ago, little has changed. If you read the **nutrition label on the side of your cereal box, you'll see that they are basically fortified carb-bombs (42).**

So, what about granola bars? The typical granola bar is essentially cereal without milk – one of the only saving graces of cereal with its protein content (43 ). Granola bars may be a great option during physical activities when you need an on-the-go snack with **quick energy. If that's not the case, however, try to avoid these.**

Stick to high-protein breakfasts such as cage-free eggs, whole bread, and whole fruits and Greek yogurt. If you find yourself in need of a granola snack for hiking or skiing, make your own, healthier version (44).



## 11. Dried Fruit



We've already answered the question of "can diabetics eat fruit?", but dried fruit should only be enjoyed in moderation (45). One of the benefits of whole, fresh fruit is that all of the water and fiber are still present. This helps fill you up and digest slower (46). Dehydrating fruits shrinks them considerably, so you end up eating more than you need (47). It also skyrockets the glycemic index, making even more of an impact on your blood sugar.

Consider grapes vs. raisins. One cup of grapes contains around 100 calories, 27g of carbs, and has a glycemic index of 9. One cup of raisins (dried grapes) contains nearly 500 calories, 131g of carbs, and has a glycemic index of 75! Always choose whole fruit over dried, and only eat dried fruit in moderation. Treat it like granola bars: only in a pinch, and preferably during physical activity.

## 12. Alcohol



**The biggest concern for diabetics with alcohol isn't the alcohol itself.** Drinking in moderation is usually safe (48). Alcohol – and the mixers used with them – is generally high in sugar with no nutritional value (49). When you do drink opt for light beers, sugar-free mixers such as club soda or diet soda, or a single glass of red wine.

Additionally, be aware of the effect that alcohol may have on your glucose levels and/or medication. Your body uses glucose stores to process the alcohol, resulting in a blood sugar dip for up to 24 hours (50). As a diabetic you need to watch out for symptoms of hyperglycemia initially, then hypoglycemia over the next day. Medication can make this worse.

Bottom line: Always drink with a meal, and be careful of having more than one at a time. Discuss medication interactions with your doctor before consuming alcohol and avoid sugary mixers.

**This may feel like a lot of information to take in, especially if you've just been diagnosed with diabetes.** Take things one step at a time – most of the foods to avoid with diabetes are VERY easy to accommodate. It will help to get the rest of your family on board as well. Even if they aren't diabetic, a diabetes diet will only improve their (and your) health.