

## Recipes for success: How to know if a recipe is a healthy one?

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Healthy cooking doesn't have to mean sacrificing taste, variety or the pleasure of eating. Everyone, not just people with diabetes, could use a healthy approach to cooking—which means a little less fat, sugar and salt; and more fruits, vegetables and whole grains. As an added bonus, diabetes-friendly recipes are also suitable for low-fat and lower sodium diets. One healthy recipe can go a long way to meet the health needs of different members of your family.

Whether you are searching for new recipes on the Internet or in cookbooks, there are a few tips that will make it easier to spot a healthy recipe. If you have family favorites you would like to adapt for someone with diabetes, speak to a dietitian who can help you transform favorite recipes into healthier meals for you and your family. Using the tips below can help you identify healthier recipes.

### 1. Look for recipes that contain healthy recipe ingredients

The healthiest ingredients are vegetables, fruits, lean meats, whole grains, and a small amount of healthy oils. Choose recipes that use:

- lentils, soy and legumes which are good protein sources and are low in fat;
- mostly whole-grain sources of grains and cereals such as whole wheat flour, rolled oats, barley, brown rice;
- lean meat or trimmed meat, skinless chicken/poultry, fresh fish or fish canned in water;
- unsaturated fats like non-hydrogenated margarine and oils such as canola or olive;
- reduced fat or low-fat ingredients such as skim or 1 per cent milk, low-fat cheese and yogurt;

### 2. Choose recipes that do not use unhealthy recipe ingredients

The least healthy ingredients are those that contain high amounts of sugar, salt, fat and refined or “processed” ingredients. Choose recipes that **do not** include:

- too much sugar—sugar in recipes doesn't need to be avoided altogether but should be limited to 1-2 tsp per

serving. This includes honey and syrup;

- too much fat – even too much “good” fat can provide extra unwanted calories. Aim for one to two tsp. per serving;
- whole milk products, a lot of regular-fat cheese or high-fat meats.

If you have a recipe that contains unhealthy ingredients, you can lighten the recipe by substituting with healthier lower fat alternatives. For example, sour cream can be replaced with low-fat plain yogurt.

### 3. Look for recipes that use a healthy cooking method

The healthiest cooking methods use little or no added fat and retain as much of the nutrients in the food as possible. Choose recipes that:

- need to be baked, roasted, or sautéed. Avoid recipes that require deep-frying. Recipes that require deep-frying can be prepared in a healthier way by stir-frying in a small amount of olive or canola oil; or substitute by baking instead;
- include grilling, steaming, boiling, stewing, or poaching. Microwaving is also a healthy cooking method;
- don't use a breading or batter to coat the fish, poultry or meat. In addition to absorbing more fat/oil, the added carbohydrates from the coating will affect blood sugar levels.

### 4. Choose recipes that include nutritional information

Many cookbooks and recipes today come with nutritional information. This tells you how much calories, fat, sugar, protein, carbohydrates, fibre and sodium the recipe contains in a serving.

- individual nutrient needs vary significantly from one person to the next. But as a general rule, a main meal recipe should have about 300 – 500 calories, at least two grams of fibre, no more than 10 grams of fat and less than 600mg of sodium in a serving;
- having nutritional information available on a recipe will help you decide whether a serving will fit



into your meal plan or whether the serving size needs to be decreased/increased to meet your meal plan needs;

- for people with diabetes, the most important nutrient to look for is the amount of carbohydrate in a serving—especially if you are carb counting;

- to calculate “available carbohydrate” - which refers to the amount of carbs that will actually be absorbed into the blood and impact blood sugar levels - subtract the amount of fibre in a serving from the total amount of carbohydrate. Some recipes will give you the amount of “available carbohydrate” which means the fibre has already been subtracted.

## Did You Know?

**November is Diabetes Awareness month.** This year's theme *Who are You fighting for?* is raising awareness about the need to fight for people living with diabetes. In Nova Scotia, 98,000 people are living with diabetes and the goal of the campaign is to raise awareness about the challenges of living with diabetes. **To learn more, visit [diabetes.ca](http://diabetes.ca) or phone 1-800-BANTING (226-8464) and join the fight against diabetes.**

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