

Brother, can you spare a sweet treat?

Yes, people with diabetes can indulge, as long as you set limits and know the signs of something gone wrong

If you have diabetes, you've probably heard "Watch your sweets!" or "Watch your carbs!" often.

"Blood sugar numbers are going to be higher. That's going to require more oral medication or insulin shots," says [Jennifer Adcock](#), RN, BSN, CDCES, explaining what can go wrong if you overindulge. "If blood sugar levels are left unchecked, it can lead to diabetic ketoacidosis. That's where all of the available sugar is not being used by your cells. Your cells need sugar to function. So your body breaks down fat and releases acid into your bloodstream. You can easily get dehydrated. It can be a life-threatening condition."

But we're all human. We all crave a treat from time to time. So rather than avoiding things like candy and chips and just craving them more, health care providers like Adcock, a certified diabetes care and education specialist at OSF HealthCare, have tips to be happy and keep your diabetes in check.

- First, be honest with your provider about what you're eating and drinking. They are the experts, so they can work with you to come up with a diet that fulfills you physically and emotionally.
- Practice moderation. Don't have sweet and salty treats around you all the time.

"Don't go to Costco and buy in bulk," Adcock says with a smile. "Have just enough to get you through the day.

"Don't sit down in front of the TV and mindlessly snack," she adds. "It helps to have portioned servings that are within your meal plan."

- Avoid impulse buys, too. We've all seen the rack of candy bars in the grocery store checkout area. If you've planned, for example, for a sweet treat with dinner, go for it. If not, resist the urge to just grab the candy for candy's sake.
- Not all sweets are created equal.

"Anything that's highly concentrated in just sugar and has zero nutritional value," is what you want to avoid, Adcock says. "Even fruit juice – that's kind of a 'sugar bomb.' While it does have some nutrients, you'd be better off eating the fruit in its whole form."

Berries, melons and grapes are good "whole food" options, Adcock says. And dark chocolate is better than regular chocolate, she says. But soda is one morsel to avoid. Replace it with sugar-free beverages.

Another option: "If chips are what you're after for that crunch, start with a handful of baby carrots. Then finish with 17 chips, which is a typical serving," Adcock says. "It's going to fill you up. The carrot has the same crunch as a potato chip, but it has far more nutrients, far less calories and way fewer carbohydrates."

Know the signs

What should people with diabetes watch for to know if sweets are wreaking havoc on their insides? First, you should always monitor your blood sugar level as advised by your provider. The latest technology is a continuous glucose monitor, which is a patch on your skin with a filament that pricks you every few minutes. Know what numbers are normal for you.

Aside from that, watch for nausea, vomiting, chills, shaking and just a general sick feeling, Adcock says.

“You need to take a dose of insulin that you typically would. Or if you’re not on insulin, let your provider know your blood sugar is high,” Adcock says. “If you’re just feeling blah after overeating and your blood sugar is high, just monitor your blood sugar every half an hour to an hour. After four hours if it’s not coming down, that would be a time to say, ‘Hey, maybe this is more serious.’ Or if you’re having those flu-like symptoms with high blood sugar, then absolutely go to the emergency department.”

Learn more

Read more about preventing and treating diabetes on the [OSF HealthCare website](#).