

Managing holiday meals and diabetes

Holiday meals bring candy, cookies and other sweets in bountiful amounts. Most of us will chow down with a promise to [return to healthy eating tomorrow](#). But people with diabetes must closely monitor their intake of sugar and carbohydrates at every meal.

What is diabetes?

[Aminat Ogun, MD](#), is a family medicine physician at OSF HealthCare in Champaign, Illinois. She says diabetes is a disorder that affects how your body uses blood sugar. Type 1 diabetes is when an autoimmune reaction stops your body from making insulin. Type 2 is when the body can't recognize insulin and use it well. Gestational diabetes occurs in pregnant women.

Dr. Ogun says a sedentary lifestyle can be a big risk factor for developing diabetes, so regular exercise is important. Treatment typically involves medication and lifestyle changes.

Moderation is key

Dr. Ogun says there's no magic number of cookies you can eat on Christmas and walk away with no diabetes complications. Your nutrition depends on your age, sex, height, weight and more. Plus, she says the brain needs *some* sugar to function.

Dr. Ogun recommends small portions. Put just a couple of cookies or chocolates on your plate after the holiday meal. Don't keep going back for more.

Mix in healthier snacks, like fruits, vegetables, nuts and legumes. Look for "whole grain" or "whole wheat" on the label. If you're craving sugar, try yogurt with berries or an apple with peanut butter. Artificial sweeteners are another option to satisfy the sweet tooth, as Dr. Ogun says they do not raise your blood sugar level. For example, mix a sweetener powder into your water.

Dr. Ogun says if you rely on insulin, check your blood sugar level as often as your doctor advises.

"You would have discussed with your doctor the amount of carbohydrates you can take," Dr. Ogun says. "Try to keep to that level."

Dr. Ogun admits it may be more difficult for children not to gorge on holiday sweets. So, parents need to keep a close eye and provide motivation to eat healthy.

"If they eat a certain amount of vegetables or fruits in a day, maybe reward with a cookie or snack," Dr. Ogun suggests.

Learn more

Symptoms of diabetes include increased urination, increased thirst and blurred vision. More serious cases could bring nausea, vomiting and eye, heart and kidney issues. Nerve damage leading to numbness and tingling in your hands and feet known as [diabetic neuropathy](#) is also possible.

"We lose sensation in those areas. People may step on a nail and might not feel it," Dr. Ogun says. "The issue grows and grows and leads to an ulcer, which makes wound healing harder for diabetic patients."

“That’s when we have to consider amputation,” of a foot, for example, she adds.

Diabetes can also be fatal, Dr. Ogun says.

Read about diabetes care on the [OSF HealthCare website](#). If you have questions about this disorder or have symptoms, talk to your primary care provider.