



dear nurse



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I have a stoma, now I have diabetes – what can I eat?

I have been a specialist stoma nurse for three years, and prior to this I worked in general practice for six years. My role in general practice was supporting patients with long term conditions, mainly diabetes.

In my clinical setting I often review established ostomates who are developing other health complications. One of the most common is type 2 diabetes, which is a condition that is on the increase in the UK.

I am often asked about the best ways to manage the two diets as the advice can be contradictory.

I have just been diagnosed with diabetes – what can I eat?

The general dietary advice for someone with a stoma is the same as a person without, namely a healthy balanced diet.

After a diagnosis of diabetes, this general advice doesn't change. Specialist diabetes nurses often recommend a diet containing things high in fibre, such as wholemeal breads and cereals, fresh fruit and products high in protein such as chicken, cheese and eggs. As readers will know while these food products are often suitable for ostomates, some of them can cause problems. For example, too much fibre can cause watery output and some fruits can cause blockages due to skin or seeds. This can be confusing for people about what they should and shouldn't eat.

Historically, diabetes guidance focused on sugars that were eaten, however current guidance and research now focuses on carbohydrates. A low carbohydrate diet can improve diabetes and also promote weight loss, which will also improve diabetic control.

Aim for 130g of carbs a day or less



The aim of maintaining a low carbohydrate plan is eating 130 grams of carbohydrates a day or less. This level of carbohydrates can improve diabetic control and focusing on carbohydrates enables an ostomate to make suitable switches for both stoma and diabetes management.

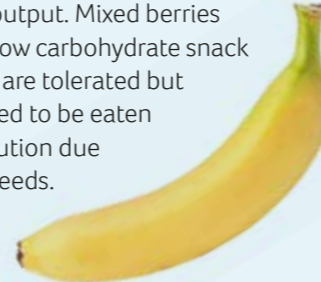
Bread is a good example of this. One standard medium slice of wholemeal bread has approximately 14 grams of carbohydrates, while white bread has approximately 13 grams. From a diabetes management plan either would be suitable, but wholemeal products are often suggested with diabetes management as they have a greater effect on the glycaemic index.

Glycaemic index is the rate that carbohydrates are broken down in the body. The higher the GI index the quicker these are broken down causing a rise in blood glucose levels. Jelly sweets will have a high GI index while porridge oats will have a low GI index and having an understanding of this can help improve diabetic management.

White starchy products however can thicken the output of a stoma and therefore may be more suitable for an ostomate.

What fruit can I eat?

Although fruits have natural sugars and may need to be eaten in moderation with diabetes, they offer a good solution for a snack that will keep you fuller for longer. Some fruits offer more fibre than others, which may cause wind and produce a more frequent output. While this may result in more frequent pouch changes, fruit you can tolerate as an ostomate should be incorporated as part of a healthy balanced diet. Bananas are a good example of suiting both eating plans as they are low in carbohydrates while also helping to thicken a looser output. Mixed berries offer a low carbohydrate snack if these are tolerated but may need to be eaten with caution due to the seeds.



Can I have protein with my meals?

Yes you can. Fish, poultry, lean meats and eggs all have health benefits both for an ostomate and someone living with diabetes. Proteins are necessary for the repair and growth of the body's tissues. Other sources of proteins are whole nuts (e.g. cashew nuts and almonds), peas, beans and lentils. While these have the health benefits of being high in protein and low in carbohydrates these can lead to constipation with a stoma and may need to be eaten in small amounts. Quorn and tofu products are both low in carbohydrates and high in protein.



Foods to reduce

Some ostomates may have foods such as jelly babies and marshmallows to thicken their output. While these are an effective way to thicken output, both are high in carbohydrates. Four large marshmallows for example, have 25 grams of carbohydrates.



Pasta, rice, white bread and bananas are alternatives that can be eaten to help thicken output. Comparing the carbohydrate content of these products demonstrates what an effective switch this would be to both thicken output and improve diabetic control. Two slices of medium white bread have around 30 grams of carbohydrates and a medium sized banana approximately 17 grams, demonstrating the effectiveness of such switches. Both can help to thicken the output but with the lower carbohydrate value improve diabetic control. Both would also be a more substantial snack, reducing the need for further snacking (such as another four marshmallows!).



Summary

Having a healthy balanced diet is the advice for all ostomates and this does not change when managing diabetes. Sometimes diet is trial and error, especially if trying new foods. Keeping a food diary when introducing new foods, while adding new foods one at a time, can help identify those that work and those that cause problems such as watery output or constipation.

For further dietary advice and support speak to your stoma nurse or diabetes team.

