

- » Understanding the effects of desserts on blood glucose
- » Deciphering the differences between diabetes desserts

## Chapter **1**

# Defining Diabetes-Friendly Desserts

The term “diabetes-friendly desserts” may seem like an oxymoron to many people. After all, aren’t individuals with diabetes supposed to avoid desserts altogether? In order to answer that question, you need to first understand how sugar affects your health and realize that not all desserts are created equal. By discovering how to prepare nutritious and delicious desserts, you can keep your blood sugar in check and satisfy your sweet cravings in a healthful way which prevents overindulgence in desserts that aren’t good for you.

This chapter serves as your entry point into the world of diabetes desserts. I preview what you can discover in this book, including sugar’s effect on glucose and how to harness the power of healthful ingredients in desserts.

## Exploring Blood Glucose Levels

Consuming sugars and simple carbohydrates plays a direct role on a person’s blood glucose levels. *Simple sugars* consist of glucose, fructose, and sucrose. Carbohydrates are found in *simple*, readily available small molecular forms called

sugars or are linked together in more *complex* carbohydrates. When the body handles glucose improperly, symptoms of diabetes occur.

A hormone referred to as *insulin* controls the level of glucose in your blood. This hormone is a chemical substance made in one part of the body that travels to another part of the body to open cells so that glucose can enter. If it can't enter the cell, it can't provide energy to the body.

Insulin plays a major role in regulating blood sugar, is essential for growth, and enables fat and muscle to develop. When you don't have a sufficient amount of insulin, or when insulin isn't working effectively, glucose starts to rise. If it rises above a certain level (specifically 180mg/dl (10>0 mmol/L)), glucose begins to spill into the urine and make it sweet. The loss of glucose leads to short-term complications of diabetes.



REMEMBER

Your blood glucose level is the level of sugar in your blood, a key measure in diabetes. Glucose can change in just 30 minutes time, especially before and after meals. That's why monitoring your blood glucose continuously is so important in order to make sure that your glucose levels are not too high or too low. Dehydration, fatigue, kidney problems, and others are direct results of having imbalanced blood glucose.

The following sections touch on the role that sugar plays in your mental and physical health and how to regulate your blood sugar while enjoying desserts.

## Looking at how sugar affects the mind and body

As I discuss in Chapter 2, consuming too much sugar, not balancing simple carbs in meals, or eating sweet foods or drinks by themselves will quickly affect your mind and body. Blood glucose levels that are too high will affect your ability to function normally because your brain needs correct levels of glucose to function properly. Glucose that's too high or too low can affect your ability to think clearly. Glucose that's too low can even cause loss of consciousness.

There's no magic number for the amount of sugar that you should eat in a day. However, many health professionals believe that you should eat as little as possible and balance it with good quality proteins and fats to lower the glycemic load of the foods that you do eat and prevent blood sugar spikes.

# Regulating your blood sugar while enjoying desserts

You can regulate your blood sugar in many ways besides medicine and insulin. As Chapter 3 examines, a healthy attitude, approach to life, and lifestyle in general make a big difference. Even your thoughts and emotions help prevent blood sugar spikes. Taking charge of your mental health as well as your physical health is important in order to regulate your blood sugar.



REMEMBER

Keep the following in mind when selecting desserts to eat when you have diabetes to regulate your blood sugar:

» **Ensure that the desserts you're eating are as healthful as possible.**

The recipes in Part 3 are a great place to start.

» **Make your own desserts.** When you make your own, you can ensure you're using nourishing ingredients and natural sweeteners that don't spike blood sugar.

Although certain foods such as simple sugars and carbohydrates can cause blood spikes when eaten in large amounts and not balanced with other macronutrients — protein, carbohydrate (in this case complex carbs), and fat — everyone's body responds differently to various foods.

» **Regularly monitor your blood glucose to make sure that your levels stay balanced.** If you notice any patterns of sudden rises or sudden dips when eating or drinking certain things, or even thinking certain thoughts or after having not gotten enough sleep, take the necessary action to ensure that it doesn't continue.

## Creating a Lifestyle That Supports Diabetes Desserts

A diabetes diagnosis doesn't have to be a bad thing. Think of it as your body's alert signal letting you know that something is off. You deserve to enjoy the sweetness of life and good health. A diagnosis is your permission slip to take good care of yourself.

Luckily, many of the lifestyle changes that support being able to eat diabetes-friendly desserts include activities that help your mental and physical health in general, and are free and readily available. Engaging in pleasurable activities such as hobbies and other things you enjoy doing, spending time outdoors, exercising, getting plentiful sleep including daily naps, and spending time in communal and even volunteer activities are all easy lifestyle additions that help the body to metabolize sugar better in the first place.

Thinking positively, practicing gratitude, and doing breath work and yoga are all easy additions that pay off in the long and short term. Cooking diabetes-friendly meals, including desserts, is also much easier than it seems. Dr. Simon Poole and I outline our best tips in our other books — the most recent editions of *Diabetes For Dummies*, *Diabetes Meal Planning & Nutrition*, and *Diabetes Cookbook For Dummies* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.).

If you've recently been diagnosed with diabetes or prediabetes, you may feel overwhelmed — in particular about eating desserts and making better food choices.

These sections examine the essential information that you need to know about creating a lifestyle so you can enjoy eating the desserts in Part 3.

## Eating right — Focusing on macronutrients

Balancing *macronutrients* — carbs, fats, and proteins — is important to everyone, but for people with diabetes, it's essential, especially if you want to enjoy desserts. Every time you eat, you should ensure that you choose the best quality complex carbs (whole grains and sweet potatoes are two examples) healthful fats (extra-virgin olive oil, avocado, and nuts are examples), and quality, low-fat protein (fish, seafood, chicken, edamame, beans, and legumes are examples). Chapter 4 provides more details.

## Fitting diabetes-friendly desserts into your diet

If you want to have your cake and eat it too, literally, then you have to balance the rest of your meals during that same day in order to avoid blood sugar spikes. Say you know that you're going out to dinner and you'll splurge on a small portion of dessert, then eat well-balanced meals for breakfast and lunch that incorporate a single serving of complex carbs with lean protein and quality fats.

Be sure to get physical activity during the day. At dinner, prior to the dessert, eat a meal that consists of healthful fats, lean protein, and lots of green leafy vegetables. That way the extra simple sugars and carbs in the dessert won't affect you as much as if you ate a dinner heavy with simple carbs and unhealthy fats.

Refer to Chapter 5 for more information about ways to include diabetes-friendly desserts into your diet.

## Having the right ingredients on hand

Starting out with the right ingredients in your kitchen makes preparing diabetes-friendly desserts a cinch. Chapter 6 describes building a pantry and how to choose healthful ingredients. For dessert making, a good selection of flours, nuts, EVOO, dark chocolate, cocoa powder, and natural sugars such as organic coconut and date sugar as well as raw honey are good options.

## Choosing healthful desserts when not home

When eating out, selecting the best desserts is so important. This decision can be tricky because many menu descriptions make things sound better than they are. For instance, although a restaurant dessert may be made with dark chocolate, it may also include unhealthy fats and lots of sugar. However, no one expects that you completely give up restaurant and purchased desserts. That said, try to avoid them as much as possible and opt for the recipes in Part 3.



TIP

If you're going out to eat, plan in advance by ordering a meal that's high in lean protein, healthful fat like EVOO, and carbohydrates like leafy greens, and non-starchy vegetables. Including these macronutrients in your meal help you to prevent blood sugar spikes when enjoying dessert. When you do decide to order dessert in a restaurant, try to share it with others or only eat a small portion of it. Restaurant portions are consistently much larger than actual portion sizes. Eating an entire dessert can cause spikes in your blood sugar.

Chapter 5 explains in greater detail what you need to know about store-bought and restaurant desserts.

## MY STORY: MY PASSION FOR HELPING PEOPLE WITH DIABETES

I was 15 years old when my mom came home from the doctor with a diabetes diagnosis. Her doctor scribbled down some off-limits foods on a single sheet of a prescription pad and told her not to eat sugar. That was pretty much it. During those days, I used to cook dinner for my parents and me after school because my mom worked and got home late. I felt so limited by that list of things that we couldn't eat that I forgot to think about what we could. A few days after the shock wore off, I started making a list of the foods we could eat and vowed to make my mom recipes using those ingredients.

My first cookbook consisted of recipes that I figured would be safe for my mom to eat and delicious for the rest of us. Keep in mind that this was the early 1990s — long before internet recipes, online cookbooks, and apps were available. I relied on information that I could find in books. In those days many of the diabetes cookbooks were labelled “diabetic recipes” and were full of some of the sweetest desserts around, focusing on substituting sugar alternatives for sucrose.

I intuitively knew that artificial sweeteners weren't the way to go, even though they were very popular at the time and even though some doctors were recommending them. I turned to some traditional Italian desserts that were naturally less sweet and incorporated some nutritious ingredients like fruit and spices as much as possible. Little did I know that this necessity to find good food that's also good for you for my mom would lead to my current career.

About 15 years ago my quest deepened. I went from searching for ingredients that wouldn't cause blood sugar to spike for people with diabetes to looking for superfoods (like EVOO, broccoli, plain Greek yogurt, and berries) that are particularly beneficial for people with diabetes and would positively impact their health. Each discovery was like finding a jewel that would help my mom and other family members live and eat better.

Then I went through my own health challenges. I was diagnosed with Stage 3 Lyme disease that had wreaked havoc on my central nervous system. I had more than 40 medical symptoms and was legally disabled for three years. My prognosis wasn't good. People in my therapy group had arrived at Stage 4 and died of heart attacks. My doctor told me that even if I got rid of my symptoms, I'd never get rid of the illness in my blood. My existence was constant pain and suffering.

I tried every conventional and complimentary therapy I could looking for relief. But getting better was taking longer than I could handle. My prayers turned from asking for healing to asking for the courage to take my own life because I no longer believed that healing was possible. At that time, my doctor recommended that I speak to a

mind-body therapist, the late Kathleen Ammalee Rogers. She explained that the breadth of her work relied on the philosophy that we all have the capacity to heal ourselves and that each disease was simply the physical manifestation of an old belief that no longer served us and needed to be cleared out from our bodies.

For the next year I continued regular visits with Kathleen as well as taking my prescribed medicines, seeing a top-tier chiropractor, and attending neuro-biofeedback sessions. I prayed, meditated, used positive imagery and nutrition, and everything else I could to heal.

Within that time, I learned so much about how both the body and mind work together in order to achieve better health. Today, I incorporate this philosophy into new challenges that I've faced since as well. After I healed, I vowed that if I lived and healed, I'd dedicate my life to cooking, writing, and sharing the positive things that I've learned with people. I believe in incorporating as many things as possible to feel your best, and I bring that attitude to this book.

My career has focused on writing and educating people about the Mediterranean diet and lifestyle and often about diabetes-friendly foods. I must admit, I never thought I'd write a book on diabetes desserts. I've already written or cowritten 19 books, most of them based on the Mediterranean diet, the Mediterranean lifestyle, and diabetes-friendly cuisine. In those books, desserts weren't the focus. Even in the *Diabetes Cookbook For Dummies* that I released last year with Dr. Simon Poole, I created desserts mostly out of fresh fruit, nuts, and cheese, which is what you should be consuming anyway.

## Preparing and Eating Delicious Dessert Recipes

This cookbook includes dishes that are naturally healthful and can be enjoyed as a part of a nutritious meal more frequently. You aren't limited to bland and tasteless desserts. Diabetes-friendly desserts come in all sizes and shapes. Here are the main types of dessert recipes that I include in this book:

- » **Fruit-based desserts:** Enjoying fresh fruit for dessert helps you to reach the fresh fruit and veggies requirements of a healthful diet while enabling you to enjoy natural sweetness and prevent you from indulging in more unhealthy desserts.

Make fresh fruit and veggies the base of your diet. Even though various diets and meal plans recommend different quantities of consuming fresh produce, the Mediterranean diet, ranked the best in the world for eight years in a row at the time of writing this book, recommends 9 to 12 servings of fresh fruit and vegetables per day. In the United States, the recommended dietary guidelines are 1.5 to 2 cups of fruit and 2 to 3 servings of vegetables, which is notably lower than Mediterranean standards. Putting fruit into dessert is another step toward getting your daily quotient. Refer to Chapter 9 for fruit-based dessert recipes.

- » **Brownies and bars:** They're quintessential American desserts that have become popular around the globe. Normally these treats are laden with butter and table sugar, though.

Chapter 10 explains how to swap out healthier whole-grain and nut flours. Polyphenol-rich EVOO is also the protagonist, as it is throughout the recipes in this book, adding flavor and healthful fats. These recipes also freeze well and make great host gifts. Plus, they bake up in a short time. Last minute guests? No problem!

- » **Cookies:** Cookies are a popular international pick-me-up. Chapter 11 explores how to make classics and new varieties while incorporating nutrient-dense ingredients. Keep these recipes in mind for holidays. They make great edible gifts.
- » **Spoon desserts and puddings:** These recipes are among the easiest desserts to prepare because they don't require baking. Chapter 12 uses dark chocolate, chia seeds, and other healthful ingredients to allow you to indulge in creamy sweet flavors without any consequence. These are great make-ahead desserts to enjoy anytime.
- » **Bite-sized treats:** Truffles, chocolates, and chocolate-covered fruit are fantastic ways to indulge your sweet tooth and enjoy the nutritional benefits of antioxidants.
- » **Frozen treats:** Whipping up gelato, ice cream, and sorbets on your own lends a gourmet finale to your meals. When relying on ingredients like plain, full-fat Greek yogurt, fruit, and dark chocolate, you can make these favorites more nutritious (refer to Chapter 14). Have one or more of these treats on hand to avoid less healthy versions in the warmer months.
- » **Tarts and pies:** Both veteran and new bakers can discover how to master diabetes-friendly tarts and pies. Making some of the nutritious nut-based crusts in advance gives you an advantage so that you can make a fruit-based version when you need it. Check out Chapter 15 and save these recipes for special occasions and for sharing because they're showstoppers!

- » **Sweet sips:** Sweet-tasting beverages are a great way to end a meal, especially when they're full of antioxidant-rich fruit, dark chocolate, and spices. Chapter 16 has some recipes that you can enjoy when you need a quick pick-me-up or when you're entertaining.
- » **Cakes:** If you've never made homemade cakes before, don't worry, these are classic, foolproof recipes that have stood the test of time. Best of all, you can make the recipes in Chapter 17 in advance, freeze them, and then serve them at a later date when you need them. Keep them in mind for potlucks, when you host guests, and when you need to bring a dish to a gathering. After all, if you bring a nutritious dessert, you can ensure that you enjoy one at a party without having to explain your meal plan.

## MAKING SMARTER DIABETES-FRIENDLY DESSERT CHOICES

When evaluating and selecting diabetes-friendly desserts, factor in specific guidance from a nutrition professional as well as patterns in your glucose readings. If you consistently have high blood sugar after eating a certain type of food, avoid it. But if your readings are consistent, and you're eating healthful foods, you can afford to enjoy a nutritious dessert every now and then.

The chapters in Part 4 can help you pick the best diabetes-friendly desserts. These chapters cover the following:

- **Ways to enjoy desserts:** Chapter 18 explains in plain English easy ways to enjoy desserts with a diabetes diagnosis.
- **Debunked myths about desserts:** Chapter 19 dispels the myths that you might have heard about diabetes and desserts.
- **Diabetes-friendly ingredients:** Chapter 20 discusses the best diabetes-friendly ingredients to stock in your pantry, fridge, and freezer for dessert making.

