Food Hacks for Diabetics Who Love to Eat

by REBECCA PACIOREK

Diabetic Food Swaps to Try

Diabetes is not a life sentence to boring and unappetizing food. When I was first diagnosed, I was so worried about all the foods I COULDN'T eat that it was hard to think about all the great foods I COULD eat. In time, I grew to be more creative in my thinking and I am very rarely unsatisfied with what I eat these days.

Everyone's heard of "life hacks," right? What I figured out is that you have to have "food hacks" for all your favorite foods and eating events.

If you have a plan and something yummy to look forward to, you won't feel like you are missing out so much. Let's take it course by course and I'll share my food hacks with you.

Appetizers

When it comes to appetizers, there are so many yummy things out there, it can be overwhelming. But, alas, you CAN do this.

My favorite appetizer is any kind of dip. Most appetizer dips are low/no carb but can be relatively high in fat.

When going to an event, I always ask if there will be a vegetable tray and if not, I volunteer to bring one. This is perfect because you can then sample on any of the dips without guilt by using the veggies instead of high-carb nachos, crackers, or chips.

Cucumbers make easy chip substitutes and celery is always good because it's natural grooves keep the dip in. You can also be on the lookout for cheese and pepperoni or salami/cream cheese rollups. These are also no-carb snacks that are perfect for diabetics.

And, if you just HAVE to have some potato chips or nachos, remember that moderation is the key. Maybe have a few of those to satisfy your craving and then move to the more diabetic-friendly treats.

Salads

Lettuce salads are usually a safe bet. Just beware of any fruit additives, crouton overdoses, or sugary salad dressings. The carbs can add up quickly if you aren't careful. Usually, vinegar- and oil-based dressings are the lowest in carbohydrates.

Main Dishes

If the main dish is a meat, pork, chicken, or fish entree, you are probably fairly safe. Just beware of sugary condiments/sauces.

However, if the main entree includes pasta or rice, things get a little trickier. One two-ounce serving is 35 carbs — that is two servings of carbs. Most diabetics are only allowed a maximum of four servings at one sitting so this means your meal plan will need to be very smart.

When eating at home or the homes of close friends and family, I purchase a vegetable spiralizer and make zucchini noodles to replace the pasta. One zucchini is about enough for a big bowl of zoodles. All you have to do is nuke it in the microwave for about a minute and you are ready to go.

By making this simple substitution, I am then able to use my carbs for bread to go with my meal or for dessert. For rice, one-half cup equals 38 carbs. That's not a lot of rice and it's right at two servings. Sometimes the zoodles can work well in place of rice but if not, I try to take less rice and more of what goes over the rice if it is low carb. If rice or pasta is served as a side dish, be sure to fill up on the protein, salad, or veggie offerings instead.

Side Dishes

Low-carb vegetables are easy choices. My family is especially fond of any veggies sautéed in olive oil with a little balsamic or soy sauce added in. Grilling them also provides a nice taste.

Remember, corn on the cob and baked potatoes count as carbs, not free vegetables. And, the carb counts are high on them.

Try to avoid sugary sauce-covered veggies. Again, when in doubt, volunteer to bring something to share that you know will be fine for you to eat.

Next page: Continue reading about smart and tasty diabetic food including side dishes, desserts, and drinks.

Desserts

Yeah, this one is tough. I know. My biggest downfall is anything chocolate. If you put a pan of brownies in front of me, I really could eat the whole thing.

This is when I am in most need of having a safe food. We all know I am going to have a bite of the brownies (notice I said bite, not pan). The trick is to have a small bite of the items you really want to eat. Then, if there's something lower in carbs, have a little more of that to satisfy your sweet tooth.

Do you know how many Pinterest boards there are dedicated to Jell-O and Jell-O pudding desserts? I do, because I follow hundreds of them!

Using sugar-free Jell-O and pudding allows you to create and eat many fun desserts for each season and occasion. And, there are lots of flavors to choose from these days. Quite a few of these recipes will call for additional ingredients like cream cheese and Cool Whip in them. Believe it or not, those ingredients are very low in carbs.

Sugar-free Jell-O and pudding have been a lifesaver in my diabetes journey! Fresh fruits are also great for dessert as they are healthy and sweet but you do need to remember to count the carbs. Be sure to stick with fruits that are low on the glycemic index. Some of those would be strawberries, peaches, grapes, apples, and oranges. Those and a little Cool Whip can make an excellent dessert if you are a fruit lover.

Drinks

A quick word about drinks and a few hacks to help out.

Sodas

I think you already know this one but there is a lot of sugar in sodas. If you have to have a soda, find a diet flavor that you like.

Coffee Drinks

Skip the whipped cream and ask for sugar-free syrups. Most places have those now. They taste just as good and look just as pretty.

Alcohol

View cautiously. Many times alcohol can actually lower your blood sugar and can cause hyperglycemia. But then, drinks with a lot of fruit or juices in them tend to have a lot of carbs. So, you can see this can cause a sticky situation. If you feel you must have a social drink now and then, first we suggest you chat with your doctor for their recommendations. In addition, something like a rum and Diet Coke, a small glass of wine, or one beer might be the way to go. Moderation and safety are always the

If you feel you must have a social drink now and then, first we suggest you chat with your doctor for their recommendations. In addition, something like a rum and Diet Coke, a small glass of wine, or one beer might be the way to go. Moderation and safety are always the key. If you drink slowly, you can still be social, just make that one drink last a long time.

First the Carbs, Then the Fats

At the beginning, I was so consumed with counting the carbs, that I didn't worry about fat or calories. In general, the lower the carbs, the lower the fat/calories. But you do have to watch out — especially if you are also trying to lose weight.

While cheeses and dips are low in carbs, the calories can easily creep up on you. Same thing with the cream cheese in those Jell-O desserts. As always, moderation is the key. Work with your doctor or nutritionist to be sure you are eating the right amount of calories as well as carbs.

Diabetes doesn't mean the end of your foodie fantasies. It just means you have to plan ahead, eat smart, and make some substitutions now and then. If you find some great tips on this, we'd love to hear them.