Peanut Butter and Diabetes: Can It Really Help Regulate Blood Sugar?

by COLLEEN KELLY

Is Peanut Butter Good for Diabetics?

As someone with diabetes, has someone ever told you, “You should be eating this [insert magic food]”? Or worse: “You should not be eating that!” It’s well-meaning advice, I am sure, but no one wants to be told what they should or should not be eating. Here is a little secret, my friends… there is no food that is inherently “good” or “bad” for you. It is, more or less, the amount of the foods that you are consuming that affect your blood sugar. Have you ever wondered how protein affects blood sugar, or is peanut butter good for diabetics? Let’s find out.

Diet and Blood Sugar

Food is composed of nutrients. Macronutrients are required in large amounts and the body requires these daily. Micronutrients are required in much smaller amounts and include vitamins and minerals.

There are three types of macronutrients:

- **Fats.** Fats are often misunderstood as “the bad guy” of the diet world but they are, in fact, an important player in our bodies. Fats provide energy, are essential for insulation, protect the vital organs and aid in proper cell functioning.
- **Proteins.** Proteins are essentially the “building blocks” of the body. They provide amino acids for muscles, the brain, the nervous system, blood, skin and hair. It also helps with transportation of oxygen and other nutrients.
- **Carbohydrates.** Carbohydrates, or “carbs”, are the bodies preferred energy source. According to verywell fit, “It is easier for the body to convert carbohydrate into immediately usable energy than it is for the body to convert fat or protein into fuel. Your brain, your muscles, and your body's cells need carbohydrate to function.” Carbs are converted into blood sugar as they enter the bloodstream.

All macronutrients affect blood sugar levels, but the amount of carbohydrates that are consumed play the biggest part in blood sugar levels. Eating a large blueberry muffin will have a bigger impact on blood sugar levels than eating a chicken breast.

Fact vs Fiction

There is a lot of misconception when it comes to diet and blood sugar levels. Let’s see if we can clear up some of the more common myths.

Juice Is Healthy for Me…

This is neither true or false. As a certified diabetes educator, I would prefer that my patients eat an orange than

drink a glass of orange juice. Why? Because an orange contains fiber that will fill you up instead of liquid that is less likely to be satiating. Also, we are less likely to stop at a serving of orange juice.

But, in the grand scheme of blood sugar regulation, if you wanted a glass of juice, you could absolutely make it work in your diet plan. If you have type 1 diabetes and give insulin according to an insulin-to-carb ratio (ICR), you will be responsible for giving the correct amount of insulin for the correct amount of carbohydrates. If you have type 2 diabetes, you will likely be balancing your carbs throughout the day and can balance that juice into your plan if it is important to you.

Peanut Butter Helps to Regulate My Blood Sugar…

Maybe! There have been several research studies on the effect of peanut butter on blood sugar control.

A small study involving 15 participants (women with obesity) evaluated the effect of blood sugar levels after consuming peanut butter or peanuts for breakfast. Even when the women consumed higher carbohydrate lunches, they had reduced blood sugar levels, reduced appetites and consumed less food throughout the day. They also had increased levels of GLP-1 hormones, which is a hormone that stimulates insulin production, decreases insulin resistance and reduces appetite.

Peanut butter is low on the glycemic index, earning a rating of 14. The glycemic index (GI) is a 100-point scale that ranks food according to how rapidly blood sugar levels change after consuming the food. The slower the food digests, the lower the score.

There is a caveat though: some store-bought peanut butters have added sugars. Purchasing a peanut butter with added sugars will likely negate any positive benefits that would likely be earned from eating peanut butter.

Learn more about foods with hidden sugar you may not be aware of.

So, is peanut butter good for diabetics? As you can see, the answer is not necessarily clear-cut, but it can be.

I Should Cut Out All Carbohydrates…

False. As we previously discussed, carbohydrates are our preferred energy source. Yes, we also get energy from fats, but it takes a lot more work for our body to use fat for energy.

I'll Never Eat a Slice of Cake Again…

Also, false. Please, eat the birthday cake. Just because you have diabetes does not mean that your life is over. You can eat the foods that you enjoy. You may eat them less often, you may even choose to modify your recipes slightly, but you will find ways to enjoy them, especially on special occasions.