

Snacking and Gestational Diabetes

Note to the Health Care Provider: Topics in this handout are discussed in Chapter 6 of the *American Dietetic Association Guide to Gestational Diabetes Mellitus* (1).

When counseling women with gestational diabetes mellitus about snacking, consider the following strategies:

- Encourage the client to eat healthy snacks that are nutrient dense and to avoid high-sugar, high-fat, and high-calorie snack foods.
- Advise the woman to eat snacks at approximately the same time every day to avoid hyperglycemia and hypoglycemia. This is especially important for women receiving insulin therapy. Some women may require two evening snacks (early and late at night) to avoid ketone production in the morning.
- Some foods are considered “free” because they are low in calories when consumed in small amounts. Caution the client that eating large portions of these foods can increase her calorie intake and contribute to elevated blood glucose levels and excessive weight gain.

Reference

1. Thomas AM, Gutierrez YM. Medical nutrition therapy. In: *American Dietetic Association Guide to Gestational Diabetes Mellitus*. Chicago, IL: American Dietetic Association; 2005:45-64.

Snacking and Gestational Diabetes

Most women with gestational diabetes need to eat snacks between meals. The food plan that your registered dietitian (RD) gave you probably includes snacks. Here's why:



- Snacks keep you from getting hungry between meals and during the night.
- Snacks keep you from eating too much at meals, which could make your blood glucose level rise too much.
- Eating snacks keeps your blood glucose from going too low between meals.

Because you have gestational diabetes, you need two to four snacks a day. The best snack choices for you will depend on:

- Whether you exercise
- Whether you take insulin to control your blood glucose levels

Your RD can help you learn the portions and types of snacks to choose.

Snacking Tips

Here are some guidelines for snacking wisely:

- Choose healthy snacks that you enjoy. Healthy snacks are low in calories (energy) and have nutrients, such as vitamins, that you and your baby need. Healthy snacks are not high in fat or sugar. Your RD can help you find healthy choices that you like.
- Count your snack carbohydrates. Most of your snacks should be 1 or 2 carbohydrate choices (15 to 30 grams of carbohydrates).
- Try to eat your snacks around the same time every day.
- Talk to your RD about night-time snacks. You may need to eat two evening snacks so your body does not make ketones.

Examples of Food Plans That Include Snacks

Carbohydrate Snack Example

The Healthy Snacks That Are 1 Carbohydrate Choice chart lists healthy snacks that are each 1 carbohydrate choice. If your food plan includes a snack with 2 carbohydrate choices, you could either double the amount of one snack on the chart or eat two different snacks from the chart.

For example, you could eat 2 slices of bread. Or you could eat 3 cups of unbuttered popcorn and 8 ounces of milk.



Healthy Snacks That Are 1 Carbohydrate Choice (1 carbohydrate choice = about 15 grams of carbohydrate)	
Snack	Amount
Bread (white, whole wheat, or rye)	1 slice
Rice cake (4-inches across)	2
Animal crackers	8
English muffin	½
Unsweetened ready-to-eat cereal	½–¾ cup (check the nutrition label)
Fruit cup	½ cup
Raisins	2 tablespoons
Grapes, small	17
Watermelon	1 small slice
Mango	½
Milk	8 ounces (1 cup)
Low-fat or fat-free yogurt	6 ounces
Raw vegetables	3 cups
Melba toast	4 slices
Baked potato chips or baked tortilla chips	15-20
Saltine crackers	6
Wheat Thins	14
Tortilla (6-inches across)	1
Popcorn, no butter	3 cups
Graham crackers (2½-inch squares)	3 squares
Apple sauce	½ cup
Pretzels	¾ ounce
Oyster crackers	20
Goldfish crackers	40

Protein Snack Example

Your food plan might include snacks with protein foods to give you enough calories. Your plan will tell you how many servings of protein you need for each snack.

You can get one serving of protein from any of the following foods:



- 1 ounce or 1½ slices of cheese
- 2 tablespoons of peanut butter
- 1 ounce of meat
- 1 egg
- 2 tablespoons of nuts

If your food plan tells you to add two servings of protein foods to your snack, you could choose an omelet made with an egg and one and a half slices of cheese.

Free Foods

Some foods are called **free foods** because you do not have to count them as part of your meal or snack in your food plan.

There are two kinds of free foods:

- **Calorie-free foods:** Foods with zero calories, such as club soda, coffee, and vinegar, never have to be counted on your food plan.
- **Foods with less than 20 calories and less than 5 grams of carbohydrates in one serving:**
 - You can eat up to three servings of these kinds of free foods per day. You do not have to count them in your food plan, as long as you have the three portions at three different times spread throughout the day.
 - If you eat three of these foods at the same time, they count as 1 carbohydrate choice.

- For example, two saltines have less than 3 grams of carbohydrates. Therefore, you could eat two saltines without counting them on your food plan. They are a free food, because this portion has less than 5 grams of carbohydrate.
- If you eat six saltines at once, this portion counts as 1 carbohydrate choice (15 grams of carbohydrate).



The Types of Free Foods chart has examples of both kinds of free foods. Remember to note the portion sizes for foods in the second column. If you eat a larger portion, the food is no longer “free.”

Types of Free Foods	
Free Foods with Zero Calories and Zero Carbohydrates	Free Foods with Less Than 20 Calories and Less Than 5 Grams of Carbohydrates
Sugar free gelatin	Baby carrots: 5 pieces
Sugar substitutes	Blueberries: ¼ cup
Bouillon, broth	Catsup: 1 tablespoon
Club soda	Celery sticks: 5 pieces
Seltzer water	Cocoa powder, unsweetened: 1 tablespoon
Tea	Cream cheese, fat free: 1 tablespoon
Coffee	Cucumbers, sliced: ½ cup
Mustard	Goldfish crackers: 10 crackers
Horseradish	Jam or jelly, low-sugar or light: 2 teaspoons
Vinegar	Mayonnaise, fat-free: 1 tablespoon
Soy sauce	Nondairy liquid creamer: 1 tablespoon
Diet caffeine-free soda	Popcorn: 1 cup unbuttered
Sugar-free fruit-flavored drink	Salad dressing, fat-free: 1 tablespoon
	Salad dressing, fat-free, Italian: 2 tablespoons
	Salsa: ¼ cup
	Saltines: 2 crackers
	Sour cream, fat-free: 1 tablespoon
	Syrup, sugar-free: 2 tablespoons
	Taco sauce: 1 tablespoon
	Vanilla wafer: 1 cookie
	Whipped topping, fat-free or light: 2 tablespoons

Foods with Artificial Sweeteners

Free foods that have no calories may be made with artificial sweeteners. The labels for these foods may say “sugar free” and will list artificial sweeteners on the ingredients list. Examples of artificial sweeteners and their brand names include:

- Saccharin (Sweet 'N Low, Sugar Twin, Sweet-10, or Sprinkle Sweet)
- Aspartame (Equal or NutraSweet)
- Sucralose (Splenda)
- Acesulfame K (Sweet One, Sunette)

Pregnant women should **not** have more than three servings a day of foods made with artificial sweeteners. One serving of sugar-free food is:

- 12 ounces of diet soda
- ½ cup of diet gelatin dessert
- 1 packet of sugar substitute (1 gram)

