What you should know about Diabetes and Carbohydrates….

Spreading the amount and types of carbohydrates consumed throughout the day is an essential component of diabetic meal planning. Carbohydrate controlled diets encourage the consumption of regularly scheduled meals with a variety of foods at each meal. Carbohydrates are found in starchy items such as bread, rice, pasta and potatoes as well as in fruits, vegetables, milk and juices. Simple sugars, honey and other sweet items have almost all of their calories from carbohydrates.

Diabetics should eat three to five meals per day. Skipping meals is a very bad practice. The blood sugar may go to low if you take medication and you will probably eat more at the next meal which will make your blood sugar high. Dividing your intake into regularly scheduled meals has immediate positive impact. Once a regular schedule is achieved, further adjustments to the amount of carbohydrates in each meal can be made.

Servings of common carbohydrate containing items provide approximately 15 grams of carbohydrate. A grain serving is equivalent to one slice of bread, ½ cup cooked cereal, 1 small potato or ¾ oz pretzels or tortilla chips. Vegetable servings are generally 1 cup raw or ½ cup cooked or juice. Fruit servings are 1 small whole fruit, ½ cup canned, ¼ cup dried or 1 cup diced. Dairy serving sizes would be 1 cup low-fat or non-fat milk or 6 oz yogurt. Meats, Eggs and Oils provide negligible amounts of carbohydrates so their calories are digested more slowly, entering the blood sugar at a more gradual rate. Eating a variety of foods at each meal allows for a more gradual influx of energy or sugar to enter the bloodstream. Foods with more fiber are also digested more slowly which is beneficial for blood sugar control.

Spread the servings of carbohydrate items over the planned meals. Women should plan 3-4 carbohydrate servings into each meal. Men can plan 4-5 choices per meal. No one should consume less than 9 servings per day (130 grams of carbohydrate). Severely limiting carbohydrates can have negative impact to liver, kidney and heart function as well as decrease the availability of many essential vitamins and minerals.

Intake, activity and medication will all impact your ability to maintain a healthy blood sugar. Exercise burns energy. Eat a small meal or snack with at least 2 food groups before and after exercise to provide adequate energy and consistent blood sugar.

Sweets and Alcohol provide large amounts of carbohydrates in small portions. If you are going to eat sweets or drink alcohol, do so in small amounts and cut back on the other carbohydrate items in the meal.

Written by: Alison Dvorak, MS, RD, CD-N
References: www.eatright.org; www.aadenet.org; www.diabetes.org
Guiding Principels for Diabetes Care: For health care professions; National Diabetes Education Program, NDEP.org