

## Plant-Based Foods: The Best Diet

If you want to prevent or manage diabetes, current research says your diet should be largely composed of unrefined, plant-based foods. Here are some reasons why that's the best diet.

1. *Both cholesterol and red meat are closely linked to a relatively high risk of developing type 2 diabetes - Plant foods aren't.* In a systematic review that combined the data from a number of studies on diet and the risk of diabetes, researchers found a positive relationship between meat consumption and the risk of diabetes. They found that compared to people who seldom eat meat, those who eat it regularly have a 20% greater likelihood of becoming diabetic. The researchers identified both red meat and processed meats as factors linked to the increased risk. Their recommendation? Skip the steak, bologna, and ham. Nuts, seeds, beans, tofu, veggie burgers, and soya are much better sources of protein.
2. One of the best studies showing that eating a plant-based diet is protective against diabetes is the Adventist Health Study-2, which covers more than 90,000 people. The researchers divided the study population into 5 dietary groups: those who eat meat regularly, and 4 vegetarian groups - vegans (people who eat an entirely plant-based diet); lacto-ovo-vegetarians (people who eat a plant-based diet plus some milk and eggs); lacto-ovo-pesco-vegetarians (people who also eat some fish); and semi-vegetarians (people who eat meat only occasionally). The researchers found that all of the vegetarian groups had lower rates of diabetes, and those who were vegans - those who ate an entirely plant-based diet - were only one-half as likely to have diabetes as those who ate meat regularly. This is strong evidence that eating a plant-based diet is very protective against diabetes.
3. *Unrefined plant-based foods are high in fibre, and eating a high-fibre diet provides great protection against type 2 diabetes.* Meat, eggs, milk, cheese, and other animal foods don't have fibre. Fibre is found only in plant-based foods, and only in those that aren't highly processed. A diet of unrefined, plant-based foods is also a high-fibre diet - one that will help to protect you against type 2 diabetes.
4. *Plant-based foods are good sources of healthy fats, are low in saturated fat, and don't have any trans fats.* By cutting out red meat, processed meats, and high-fat dairy foods, you are eliminating the high cholesterol and high saturated-fat foods that pose a higher risk of diabetes. The fats found in plant-based foods are polyunsaturated and are protective against type 2 diabetes. They should be part of a diabetes-prevention diet. Plant-based fats are also helpful in lowering blood cholesterol levels and preventing coronary heart disease, which is very important for diabetics.
5. *Unrefined plant-based foods generally have a low glycaemic load.* By choosing unrefined, whole, plant-based foods, you eliminate most high glycaemic load foods, such as white bread, white rice, sugar, soft drinks, chips [French fries], and so forth. Whole grains, fresh fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, and soya are all low glycaemic load foods.
6. *People who eat an unrefined, plant-based diet weigh less than those who eat animal foods regularly.* It's true. Numerous research studies have found that people who choose an unrefined, plant-based diet have significantly lower body mass index (BMI) values. They weigh less, and fat is a lower proportion of their weight. In the Adventist Health Study-2, people eating a plant-based diet weighed, on average, about 32 pounds or so less than those who ate meat regularly.
7. *An unrefined, plant-based diet is the best diet for lowering blood cholesterol levels and preventing coronary heart disease, which particularly threatens diabetics.* A presentation by Dr. William Castelli on the findings of the famous Framingham Heart Study - the primary doctor in charge of the study, he showed cholesterol's role in causing heart disease. After his presentation, he was asked, "Dr. Castelli, if you were asked to recommend the best diet to lower cholesterol and prevent heart disease, what would you recommend?" He answered, "Oh that's easy. It would be a vegetarian diet. Vegetarians have the lowest cholesterol levels

and the lowest risk of developing coronary heart disease.” Plant-based diets are free of all dietary cholesterol, are low in saturated fat, are high in fibre, and are high in antioxidants. All of these dietary factors are protective of the heart, which is important for diabetics, for whom coronary heart disease is a particular threat.

8. The Adventist Health Study-2 has also shown that those people who eat a plant-based diet have much lower blood cholesterol levels. They’re only 30% as likely to have high levels of cholesterol as are those who eat meat regularly.
9. *A plant-based diet is the preferred diet for lowering blood pressure levels.* The National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National High Blood Pressure Education Programme both recommend a diet high in fruits and vegetables and low in meat and saturated fat. Their version of this kind of a diet is called the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet. These institutions recommend eating as many as 8 or 10 servings of fruits and vegetables daily because eating a largely plant-based diet is most effective in lowering blood pressure.
10. The researchers conducting the Adventist Health Study-2 made similar findings, stating that those who eat an entirely plant-based diet have only 1/3<sup>rd</sup> the risk of high blood pressure of those who eat meat regularly.<sup>7</sup>
11. Why is this important for diabetics? Because they are at high risk of developing high blood pressure; when they do develop it, the combination of high blood pressure and high blood sugar levels proves to be deadly. Both conditions are damaging to the arteries, the heart, the brain, the eyes, the kidneys, and other vital organs. It is recommended that all diabetics test their blood pressure regularly and keep it below 120/80 mmHg.