

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

### Top 3 Diabetes Diet Myths

This month I want to share with you about a topic that is near and dear to my heart—diabetes! Diabetes is a chronic disease that impairs the way your body regulates its blood sugar level. Not only do I have a strong family history of this disease, but it is also the most common reason I see outpatients at my job. Fairfield Memorial Hospital offers an accredited Diabetes Self-Management Education program that provides personalized instruction with me and/or our Certified Diabetes Educator, Mary McCulley. Over the years, I have picked up on a handful of common misconceptions most people have about what type of eating plan is best for controlling diabetes. Here I will break down the 3 most common myths I hear and offer some evidence-based counter advice.

#### **Myth #1—You should check your food labels for sugar content.**

It certainly makes common sense that monitoring food *sugar* intake will decrease your *blood sugar*. However, it is actually carbohydrates (which include sugars) that raise your blood sugar. Therefore, I recommend you check for the *Total Carbohydrate* content on the food label to get the most complete picture of how that food will affect your blood sugar. Likewise, “sugar free” products may have no sugar, but they may still have a significant amount of carbohydrates.

#### **Myth #2— Less carbohydrates is always better.**

Now that we understand carbohydrates are the nutrient to monitor, our patients automatically assume the less carbs they eat the better their blood sugar will be. Again, makes common sense, right? The problem is, when we do not take in enough carbohydrates to support our body’s energy needs, your body is forced to release sugar from the liver. This is its way of preventing a low blood sugar. So, by taking in too few carbs or skipping meals, your blood sugar will actually run higher because of the liver’s production. Instead, we recommend a *moderate* level of carbohydrates based on your height and weight—not too high and not too low.

#### **Myth #3—The best way to treat a low blood sugar is with peanut butter or milk.**

A true low blood sugar (hypoglycemia) is defined by a blood sugar less than 70 that typically comes with a range of unpleasant symptoms such as shakiness or sweating. Since hypoglycemia is dangerous, it is important to bring your blood sugar back up to a safe level as quickly as possible. The best way to do this is with a pure carbohydrate source that digests very rapidly—such as 1/2c. of fruit juice or 3-5 glucose tablets. While peanut butter and milk do contain some carbohydrates, their fat and protein content slow the digestion of those carbs, bringing your blood sugar up too slowly.

If you are interested in learning more about diabetes or getting individualized recommendations, please visit FMH’s Diabetes Education Program at [www.fairfieldmemorial.org/content/diabetes-education](http://www.fairfieldmemorial.org/content/diabetes-education) or call 618-847-8231 or 618-847-8326.