



Dr. Samiksha Singh

Metabolic Physician & Diabetologist

9833477536 dr.samiksha.sr@gmail.com

Building a Balanced Plate

A practical guide to planning balanced meals for better glucose and metabolic health

Healthy eating does not require a separate “diabetic diet” or completely avoiding carbohydrates.

A balanced meal combines the right proportions of vegetables, protein, carbohydrates and healthy fats. This can help support glucose regulation, satiety, weight management and overall metabolic health.

The Balanced Plate

For a typical main meal, a simple starting point is:

½ Plate — Non-Starchy Vegetables

Include a generous variety of vegetables such as:

- Leafy vegetables
- Bhindi
- Beans
- Cauliflower
- Cabbage
- Brinjal
- Capsicum
- Cucumber
- Tomato
- Gourds such as lauki, tori and karela



Vegetables provide fibre, volume and important nutrients while generally having a relatively small effect on blood glucose.

¼ Plate — Protein

Include a source of protein with each main meal.

Vegetarian options:

Dal, pulses, sprouts, beans, chana, rajma, paneer, tofu, curd or other suitable protein sources.

Non-vegetarian options:

Eggs, fish, chicken or other lean protein sources.



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Protein can improve satiety and is important for maintaining muscle and overall health.

¼ Plate — Carbohydrate

Carbohydrate-containing foods may include:

- Roti or chapati
- Rice
- Millets
- Dalia
- Oats
- Other grains and cereals
- Starchy vegetables

The aim is generally **appropriate quantity and quality**, rather than eliminating carbohydrates completely.

Carbohydrates Are Not All the Same

Carbohydrates are broken down into glucose, but their effect on blood glucose can vary according to:

- The type of carbohydrate
- Portion size
- Fibre content
- How the food is prepared
- What it is eaten with
- Your individual glucose response

Whole grains and minimally processed carbohydrate sources can often provide more fibre and satiety than highly refined alternatives.

But remember: **“healthy” carbohydrates still contribute carbohydrate. Portion size continues to matter.**

Rice or Roti?

There is no universal rule that everyone with diabetes must stop eating rice or that roti is always the better choice.

Both can form part of a balanced meal.

The **quantity eaten, type of grain, accompanying foods and your individual glucose response** are often more useful considerations than simply labelling one food as “good” and another as “bad.”



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Don't Forget Protein

Indian meals can sometimes become carbohydrate-heavy, particularly when several carbohydrate sources are eaten together.

For example:

Roti + rice + potato + dessert

may provide considerably more carbohydrate than:

Vegetables + protein source + a measured portion of roti or rice + curd

Before adding more carbohydrate, ask:

“Where is the protein in this meal?”

A Practical Indian Meal

A balanced lunch or dinner might look like:

½ plate: Sabzi + salad

¼ plate: Dal / paneer / tofu / curd / eggs / fish / chicken / sprouts / soya / tempeh

¼ plate: Roti or rice

The exact quantities should be individualized according to your nutritional requirements, health conditions, physical activity and treatment goals.

What About Dal?

Dal is nutritious and provides protein, fibre and several important nutrients.

However, pulses also contain carbohydrate.

This does **not** mean dal needs to be avoided. It simply means that meal composition and portions should be considered together rather than assuming that dal is a purely protein food.

Fruit Can Be Part of a Balanced Diet

People with diabetes generally do not need to avoid fruit completely.

Prefer **whole fruit** rather than fruit juice in most situations.

Portion size and the amount eaten at one time matter. Individual glucose responses may also differ.

Fruit juice can deliver carbohydrate rapidly and usually provides less fibre than eating the whole fruit.

Be Careful With “Healthy” Foods

Foods marketed as:

Sugar-free | Diabetic-friendly | Multigrain | Natural | Organic | No added sugar

are not automatically appropriate in unlimited quantities.



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They may still contain significant amounts of carbohydrate, calories, saturated fat or sodium.

See also: *Reading Food Labels* →

Eating Out

You do not need a perfect meal every time.

When eating out, some simple strategies can help:

- Include vegetables where possible
- Choose a meaningful protein source
- Be mindful of carbohydrate portions
- Limit sugar-sweetened beverages
- Avoid automatically ordering multiple carbohydrate-rich sides
- Eat according to hunger rather than simply finishing everything served

The overall pattern of eating matters more than one occasional meal.

Build Meals You Can Sustain

A healthy eating plan should work within your:

Food preferences | Culture | Work schedule | Family meals | Medical needs | Treatment

You should not need to prepare an entirely separate meal from your family simply because you have diabetes or metabolic risk.

Small, sustainable changes that can be maintained over time are usually more useful than highly restrictive short-term diets.

Quick Takeaway

For most main meals, start by thinking:

½ Vegetables + ¼ Protein + ¼ Carbohydrate

Then individualize the portions according to your needs.

The goal is not to remove entire food groups or label foods as “good” and “bad.” It is to build meals with an appropriate balance of **quality, quantity and composition**.

This guide provides general educational information. Individual nutritional requirements may differ according to diabetes treatment, kidney or liver disease, pregnancy, weight goals and other medical conditions.