

Is Oatmeal Good for Diabetes?

The whole grain can help improve blood sugar control. Here's how to create the perfect bowl.

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September 20, 2019

Pictured recipe: [Cinnamon Roll Overnight Oats](#)

Oatmeal is a classic breakfast—and if you have diabetes, there's no reason to hesitate before sitting down to a steaming bowl of oats in the morning. In fact, it's truly one of the best breakfasts for people with diabetes.

Need some proof? A meta-analysis that analyzed 16 studies (including 14 controlled trials) on type 2 diabetes patients concluded that, compared to control groups, **including oats in your diet helped reduce A1C, fasting blood glucose, and total and ("bad") LDL cholesterol levels in people with type 2 diabetes**, per results published in the [journal *Nutrients* in 2015](#). The healthy properties of oats are largely credited to a unique type of fiber, called beta-glucan, which slows digestion and boosts satiety. Oats also supply magnesium, a mineral the authors note plays a role in the metabolism of glucose and insulin.

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"One of the main focuses [in treating] diabetes and heart disease is to decrease inflammation. Oats (specifically oat bran and oatmeal) is a wholesome, high-fiber grain that has positive effects on not only lowering LDL cholesterol, but also decreasing blood sugar spikes—and thus inflammation—in the body," says [Laura Cipullo, RD](#), a certified diabetes educator and author of [Everyday Diabetes Meals: Cooking for One or Two](#).

What's more, a bowl of oats is an ideal brain boost to jump-start your morning. "Your brain prefers carbohydrates," says Cipullo. Meaning, your noggin runs on glucose, and a healthy, whole-grain source, like oats, can power your cognitive capabilities, helping to hone attention and focus for your day ahead.

One cup of cooked oatmeal offers 143 calories, 5 grams protein and 2.5 g fat. When it comes to carbohydrates, it has 26 g of carbs, as well as nearly 4 g of fiber. When putting breakfast together, Cipullo recommends you aim for 40 to 60 grams of total carbohydrates for the meal, though individual needs will vary, so check with your health care team. (Learn more about **how many carbs you should eat per day when you have diabetes**.)

The healthiest bowl of oatmeal for diabetes

Pictured recipe: **Steel-Cut Oatmeal**

Unfortunately, it's easy to get caught up in making a not-so-healthy bowl, if you choose a packet of flavored instant oats (which contains added sugar) or top your bowl with a hefty scoop of brown sugar and raisins, which also make the carb content skyrocket.

To make the best bowl of oats if you have diabetes, follow these tips from Cipullo:

Go for steel-cut. Steel-cut oats or Irish oatmeal are less refined and more wholesome, which decreases their glycemic load, says Cipullo. These varieties "help guarantee the oats take more time and effort for the body to break down and absorb," she says.

Pair with protein. **Plain Greek yogurt** offers an additional 12 grams of protein per 1/2 cup to slow the rise in blood sugar. (It tastes great dolloped on top.) Or, stir in nut butter, a trick that gives the oatmeal a rich flavor, creamier texture and extra protein. When shopping for nut butter, buy a "natural" version that's made with only nuts (and maybe a little salt). Another option is a protein powder, like **whey protein**.

Top with fat. If you didn't already use nut butter as your protein source, now's a good time to add in slivered almonds or crushed peanuts, which offer heart-healthy monounsaturated fatty acids. Another great option, says Cipullo, is unsweetened coconut flakes.

Make with water or plant milk. You can make a delectable bowl of oats with water alone—the addition of nut butter, nuts or coconut flakes will boost the flavor of the oats without having to make it with milk. However, if you do like a sweeter taste, Cipullo suggests an unsweetened plant milk, which will be naturally lower in carbs. For

instance, 1/2 cup of [unsweetened almond milk](#) contains less than 1 gram of carbs. If you want to go even sweeter, choose an unsweetened vanilla plant milk, which won't have any extra sugar, but will have an extra dose of sweet flavor.

Dust on cinnamon. Ditch the brown sugar or maple syrup, and go for cinnamon instead. The spice not only sweetens sans calories and carbs, but it also will help lower after-meal blood sugar, says Cipullo. (Read more about [why cinnamon may help your blood sugar](#).)

Test your blood sugar. Everyone's body responds differently. To know if you're eating the right breakfast for you, test your blood sugar right before eating and then two hours after. Do this for three days, says Cipullo. "If the blood sugar is greater than your doctor or dietitian recommends, decrease the quantity of carb, like oats, and consider adding more protein, such as whey powder, or more fat," she says.

Bottom Line

People who have diabetes can enjoy all of the foods they love, perhaps with some modifications. Oatmeal is a healthy, fiber-rich carbohydrate that makes a great breakfast when you have diabetes. Using all the tips above, you can build a healthier bowl of oatmeal for breakfast. Try steel-cut oats made with unsweetened almond milk, topped with crushed peanuts and coconut flakes, or choose other flavors you love. Enjoy these healthy [Oatmeal Pancakes](#) or use oatmeal as a base for these [Baked Banana-Nut Oatmeal Cups](#).

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