

## The Glycemic Index - A tool for managing and preventing diabetes

Thirty per cent of the next generation will develop diabetes at some point in their lives. Chances are diabetes effects of will effect someone you know. To lower the risk of diabetes, the Canadian Diabetes Association recommends people eat a low Glycemic Index (GI) diet and engage in active living.

Dr. David Jenkins, a Canadian nutritional sciences professor, developed the Glycemic Index. It ranks carbohydrate-rich foods by how much they raise blood glucose (sugar) levels. When you eat food containing carbohydrates, glucose breaks down during digestion and gives you energy. After you eat, blood glucose level rise. Foods that increase glucose levels quickly have a higher GI rating. Foods that do so more slowly have a lower one.

Generally, the lower the rating, the better the quality of the carbohydrate and the greater the overall nutritional benefit. Low GI foods are usually low in calories and fat, while high in fibre, nutrients and antioxidants. Choosing low GI foods more often has many health benefits.

**Prevent obesity:** Low GI foods digest more slowly and stay in your stomach longer. This makes you feel full longer, resulting in consuming fewer calories and making it easier to control weight. In addition, low GI foods do not cause blood glucose levels to spike.

**Prevent type 2 diabetes:** High GI foods may increase the body's demand for insulin and raise the workload of the pancreas. Some researchers believe that eating a diet rich in high GI foods for many years may cause the pancreas to wear out, resulting in type 2 diabetes. Eating low GI foods can ease the demand on the pancreas.

**Manage diabetes:** Eating low-GI foods helps control blood glucose and improves the body's sensitivity to insulin. These foods do not break down into sugar as quickly and can keep blood glucose from spiking which allows the body to keep up with insulin demands. For those with diabetes, controlling blood glucose plays an important role in preventing the serious complications of the disease.

**Prevent heart disease:** High GI foods can raise cholesterol and triglyceride levels, increasing the risk of heart disease. In contrast, consuming low GI foods keeps blood glucose and insulin levels in check. Some evidence suggests low GI foods reduce total blood cholesterol and bad LDL cholesterol, while increasing heart-friendly, good HDL cholesterol.

Including lower GI foods in your diet can be easy. Eat more whole grain pasta, legumes, vegetables and low-fat dairy products. Try using vinaigrette dressings instead of creamy dressings. They are lower in fat and the acidity of the vinegar slows digestion, lowering your meal's GI. Choose breads that contain a high proportion of whole or cracked grains, stone-ground whole wheat flour, oats, bran and seeds. Aim to include at least one low GI food in each meal.

For information on GI food ratings visit <http://www.diabetes.ca/diabetes-and-you/healthy-living-resources/diet-nutrition/the-glycemic-index>. Some great low GI food recipes can be found at [www.lowgimeals.com](http://www.lowgimeals.com).

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