

Don't Be Overwhelmed by the Word Diabetes: A few small changes may be all you need

[Article Includes Spaghetti Squash & Meatballs Recipe]

-- By Kay MacInnis, Registered Dietitian at Providence Health

I recently met a woman who was overwhelmed with all the lifestyle changes she was told to make following her diabetes diagnosis. As a result, she wasn't doing any of them. Her story made me sad. Healthy guidelines should inspire, not confuse or scare. If she had only taken on a few of the suggestions, she may already be enjoying some significant health benefits.

When you are faced with a need for lifestyle changes, start with the ones that will be easiest for you.

"Healthy living" is a broad spectrum, and you don't have to be at the far end of the good choices side to reduce the risks associated with diabetes. If it would be easier to reduce your sugary beverages than sugary foods, start with your drinks. You may not want to drop your afternoon snack of fruit, but you may be able to add a piece of cheese or peanut butter to slow down sugar absorption. Maybe reducing carbs sounds impossible, but if a lot of your carbs are from "white" pasta and bread, switching to whole grains will have an impact. The key is to find the improvements you can make and keep.

Looking for ideas on where to start? Consider plate-mapping your meals. That way you can still enjoy a variety of foods, just in a more balanced and portion-controlled way. Learn more about plate-mapping [here](#).

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Here are some other simple guidelines you may be able to commit to adding or reducing.

Eat more of these...

- Whole grains, preferably paired with a protein
- Vegetables, eaten as close to their natural form as possible
- Legumes, such as beans and peas
- Fruits, paired with a protein
- Low fat dairy products
- Healthy fats—avocados, nuts, olive, canola and peanut oil

Eat less of these...

- Saturated fats—fats that are solid at room temperature
- Trans fats—found in processed foods, esp. snack foods, baked goods, shortening and stick margarine
- Sodium—try to stay under 2300 mg/day unless your doctor has given you a lower number to follow
- Simple carbohydrates—"white" grains and foods high in refined sugar

There are many other healthy guidelines, too, that can positively impact your blood sugar and overall health. I guarantee there are diabetic-friendly improvements you can make without too much sacrifice. If you're having trouble finding them, ask a dietitian for help. Your doctor can request a consultation with a registered dietitian, which could help with the costs if your insurance plans allows it.

Most importantly, be open-minded. Changes that sound extreme may actually be more enjoyable than you expect. For example, here's a way to keep your love of spaghetti and meatballs without any pasta at all!



Divide your plate up into four parts and make sure the foods you eat in each group can fit in that section of your plate. This will help you eat a balanced meal for more balanced blood sugar levels.

Spaghetti Squash & Meatballs

Recipe source: *Eating Well*

Ingredients

- 1 spaghetti squash (3 lbs)
- 2 Tbsp water
- 2 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- ½ cup chopped fresh parsley, divided
- ½ cup finely shredded Parmesan cheese, divided
- 1¼ tsp Italian seasoning, divided
- ½ tsp onion powder
- ½ tsp salt, divided
- ½ tsp freshly ground pepper
- 1 lb 93%-lean ground turkey
- 4 large cloves garlic, minced
- 1 can (28-oz) no-salt-added crushed tomatoes
- ¼- ½ tsp crushed red pepper

Directions

1. Halve squash lengthwise and scoop out the seeds. Place face down in a microwave-safe dish; add water. Microwave, uncovered, on High until the flesh can be easily scraped with a fork, 10 to 15 minutes.
2. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Scrape the squash flesh into the skillet and cook, stirring occasionally, until the moisture is evaporated and the squash is beginning to brown, 5 to 10 minutes. Stir in ¼ cup parsley. Remove from heat, cover and let stand.
3. Meanwhile, combine the remaining ¼ cup parsley, ¼ cup Parmesan, ½ teaspoon Italian seasoning, onion powder, ¼ teaspoon salt and pepper in a medium bowl. Add turkey; gently mix to combine (do not overmix). Using about 2 tablespoons each, form into 12 meatballs.
4. Heat the remaining 1 tablespoon oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add the meatballs, reduce heat to medium and cook, turning occasionally, until browned all over, 4 to 6 minutes. Push the meatballs to the side of the pan, add garlic and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add tomatoes, crushed red pepper to taste, the remaining ¾ teaspoon Italian seasoning and ¼ teaspoon salt; stir to coat the meatballs. Bring to a simmer, cover and cook, stirring occasionally, until the meatballs are cooked through, 10 to 12 minutes more.
5. Serve the sauce and meatballs over the squash, sprinkled with the remaining ¼ cup Parmesan.

Nutrition Information: 408 calories; 18 g fat; 32 g carbohydrates; 31 g protein; 74 mg cholesterol; 608 mg sodium

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