

Foods for Insulin Resistance, Pre-diabetes and Diabetes

What to choose and what to limit in each food group, and why

When insulin does not work well, blood sugar rises more after meals. The goal is **slower-digesting, fibre-rich, protein-paired foods in sensible portions**, and fewer refined carbs and sugary drinks. This guide goes through eight food groups. Rows marked **CHOOSE** are better options and rows marked **LIMIT** are foods to reduce, each with the reason.

1. Ground Rules

Principles that apply to every food group

Why this matters: How you eat matters nearly as much as what you eat.

RULE	WHAT IT MEANS	HOW
Mind the portion of carbs	Even good carbs raise sugar if the portion is big.	Use a smaller rice or roti portion and fill the rest with vegetables and protein.
Pair carbs with protein, fibre and fat	These slow digestion.	Add dal, egg, curd, vegetables or nuts.
Eat in a smart order	Vegetables and protein first, then carbs.	Can lower the sugar rise after meals.
Walk after meals	A 10 to 15 minute walk helps muscles use glucose.	Easy, free and effective.
Build muscle	Strength training improves how the body uses insulin.	2 to 3 sessions a week.
Sleep and stress	Poor sleep and stress raise blood sugar.	Aim for 7 to 8 hours and manage stress.
Liquid sugar is the worst offender	Juices, soft drinks and sweet tea raise sugar quickly.	Choose water, buttermilk or unsweetened tea.

2. Fruits

Whole fruit, sensible portions

Why it matters: Fruit has fibre, vitamins and water, so whole fruit is fine in portions for most people. Fibre slows sugar absorption, while juice and dried fruit remove that benefit. Have fruit with meals or with nuts or curd, not as large solo portions.

FOOD	VERDICT	WHY
Guava, apple, pear	CHOOSE	High in fibre and relatively gentle on blood sugar. Eat with the skin where possible.
Berries and jamun	CHOOSE	Lower in sugar for their size, and rich in antioxidants. Jamun is a traditional favourite.
Orange or mosambi (whole)	CHOOSE	The fibre and water in the whole fruit slow sugar release.
Papaya, pomegranate, watermelon (small portions)	CHOOSE	Fine in modest servings. Watermelon is watery, so keep the portion reasonable.
Mango, chikoo, custard apple, lychee, grapes	LIMIT	Very sweet and easy to overeat. Occasional small portions work better than large servings.
Ripe banana (large)	LIMIT	A small or half banana is fine for many people. Large ripe ones raise sugar faster.

FOOD	VERDICT	WHY
Dates, raisins, dried figs and other dried fruit	LIMIT	Concentrated sugar in a tiny volume, so it is very easy to overeat.
Fruit juice, sugarcane juice, smoothies with sugar	LIMIT	Fibre is stripped out and sugar arrives fast, causing sharp spikes.

3. Vegetables

Fill half the plate

Why it matters: Non-starchy vegetables are low in digestible carbs and high in fibre, so they slow digestion and fill you up. Starchy vegetables are not forbidden but should be portioned.

FOOD	VERDICT	WHY
Leafy greens (palak, methi, amaranth, cabbage)	CHOOSE	Very low in carbs, with fibre, magnesium and folate.
Bitter gourd, drumstick, ridge gourd, bottle gourd	CHOOSE	Traditional, low-calorie, high-fibre vegetables. Evidence for bitter gourd lowering sugar is limited, but it is a good low-carb choice.
Beans, cauliflower, broccoli, brinjal, lady's finger, capsicum	CHOOSE	Fibre-rich and low in carbs, so they bulk up the meal.
Tomato, cucumber, onion, carrot (raw)	CHOOSE	Good for salads and sides, with low impact in normal portions.
Potato, sweet potato, yam, colocasia	LIMIT	Starchy and quick to raise sugar in large portions. Keep them small and pair with protein and fibre.
Corn and peas (large portions)	LIMIT	Higher in carbs than most vegetables. Fine as small additions.
Fried vegetables (bhajji, chips, tikki)	LIMIT	Refined batter and oil add carbs and calories.

4. Seeds and Nuts

Small handfuls, not big bowls

Why it matters: Healthy fats, protein and fibre slow digestion and help keep you full. They are calorie-dense, so portions matter.

FOOD	VERDICT	WHY
Flax and chia seeds	CHOOSE	Fibre and omega-3. Add a teaspoon to curd, porridge or smoothies.
Pumpkin and sunflower seeds	CHOOSE	Protein, magnesium and healthy fats, good as a snack.
Almonds and walnuts	CHOOSE	Healthy fats and fibre with minimal sugar impact. A small handful a day.
Sesame (til) and fenugreek (methi) seeds	CHOOSE	Fibre and minerals. Some small studies suggest methi may help blood sugar modestly, so don't rely on it.
Peanuts (plain, roasted)	CHOOSE	Protein and fibre, affordable, in a small handful.
Sugar-coated or honey-roasted nuts, chikki, nut sweets	LIMIT	Added sugar or jaggery undoes the benefit.

FOOD	VERDICT	WHY
Large portions of cashews and mixed nut packs	LIMIT	Calories add up fast, which matters because weight loss helps insulin resistance.
Very salty or fried masala nuts	LIMIT	Extra salt and oil, with little benefit.

5. Millets and Grains

Better carbs, controlled portions

Why it matters: Carbohydrate quality and quantity matter. Whole grains and millets contain more fibre than refined grains, so they raise sugar more slowly. They are still carbohydrates, so portions still count.

FOOD	VERDICT	WHY
Ragi, jowar, bajra	CHOOSE	Fibre-rich and slower to digest than refined flour. Ragi also has calcium.
Foxtail, little, kodo and barnyard millet	CHOOSE	Gentler on sugar than polished white rice for many people.
Whole wheat roti, multigrain or millet roti	CHOOSE	More fibre than refined flour, so it digests more slowly.
Steel-cut or rolled oats (plain)	CHOOSE	Soluble fibre (beta-glucan) helps blunt spikes. Avoid flavoured packets.
Brown, red or parboiled rice (small portion)	CHOOSE	More fibre than polished white rice, but portion size still matters.
Dalia (broken wheat), barley, quinoa	CHOOSE	Fibre-rich options for variety.
White rice in large portions, polished rice	LIMIT	Digests quickly, and a big plate spikes sugar. Halve the rice and add vegetables and dal.
Maida (refined flour), white bread, naan, rusk, bakery biscuits	LIMIT	Refined, low in fibre and quick to raise sugar.
Poha, sooji upma, instant oats, cornflakes, puffed rice (large portions)	LIMIT	Often quick-digesting and low in protein. If you eat them, add vegetables, nuts or eggs.

6. Dairy

Plain and unsweetened

Why it matters: Plain dairy gives protein and calcium with little sugar. Sweetened versions can have as much sugar as desserts.

FOOD	VERDICT	WHY
Plain curd or hung curd	CHOOSE	Protein, calcium and probiotics. Eat with meals.
Buttermilk (chaas), unsweetened	CHOOSE	Light, hydrating and low in sugar.
Paneer and tofu	CHOOSE	High protein with few carbs. They keep you full.
Plain milk, moderate amounts	CHOOSE	Protein and calcium, with natural lactose. Stick to a glass without added sugar.
Greek yogurt (plain)	CHOOSE	Very high in protein, which helps fullness.

FOOD	VERDICT	WHY
Sweetened lassi, flavoured yogurt, milkshakes, rose milk	LIMIT	A lot of added sugar, in liquid form that is absorbed quickly.
Ice cream, kheer, payasam, khoa mithai, condensed milk	LIMIT	Sugar plus fat in large quantities.
Packaged sweet coffee drinks and malt drinks	LIMIT	Often loaded with sugar.

7. Outside Food

Eating out smartly

Why it matters: Restaurant food tends to have more refined flour, oil and sugar. Choosing carefully and managing portions keeps eating out manageable.

FOOD	VERDICT	WHY
Tandoori or grilled chicken, fish, paneer tikka	CHOOSE	Protein-rich with few carbs and less oil than gravy dishes.
Idli or plain dosa with sambar and chutney	CHOOSE	Fermented and lighter. The sambar adds fibre and protein, but keep portions modest.
Dal with roti or small rice, plus vegetables	CHOOSE	A balanced plate of protein, fibre and carbs.
Egg dishes, sprouts chaat, salads, clear soups	CHOOSE	Protein and fibre with low sugar impact.
Biryani, fried rice, pulao in large portions	LIMIT	A big carb portion with oil. If you have it, share, and add raita and salad.
Naan, kulcha, parotta, puri, bhatura	LIMIT	Refined flour and oil, which spikes sugar quickly.
Samosa, pakora, vada pav, fries, burgers, pizza, noodles	LIMIT	Refined carbs and fried food.
Sweet gravies, desserts and sugary drinks	LIMIT	Liquid sugar is the fastest spike.
Tip: protein and vegetables first, carbs last	CHOOSE	Eating them first can reduce the sugar rise after the meal.

8. Typical Home Foods

Make everyday meals work

Why it matters: Most of your food is eaten at home, so small tweaks to regular meals matter most. Focus on the plate balance: more vegetables and protein, smaller rice or roti portions.

FOOD	VERDICT	WHY
Dal, sambar with vegetables, rasam	CHOOSE	Protein and fibre in familiar foods.
Vegetable palya or sabzi, kosambari, raita	CHOOSE	Fibre and volume with few calories.
Egg, fish or chicken curry with roti	CHOOSE	Protein slows the sugar rise from carbs.

FOOD	VERDICT	WHY
Ragi mudde or jowar roti, smaller portion	CHOOSE	Fibre-rich. Pair with sambar or a curry.
Moong dal chilla, besan chilla, egg dosa	CHOOSE	Higher protein breakfasts.
A big plate of rice	LIMIT	Large portions drive spikes, so use a smaller portion with more dal and vegetables.
Poori, stuffed parathas, bonda, fried snacks	LIMIT	Refined flour or potato with lots of oil.
Sweet breakfast, such as plain upma, poha or ven pongal in large portions	LIMIT	Mostly carbs and low in protein. Add eggs, sprouts or sambar.
Payasam, laddu, jalebi, jaggery, honey	LIMIT	Jaggery and honey are still sugar, so treat them as occasional sweets.

9. Snacks

What to reach for

Why it matters: Snacks should add protein or fibre and avoid refined flour and sugar. A good snack bridges hunger between meals without a spike.

FOOD	VERDICT	WHY
Roasted chana and sprouts	CHOOSE	Protein and fibre, filling and cheap.
Makhana (roasted, lightly salted)	CHOOSE	Light and crunchy, with few carbs.
Boiled egg, paneer cubes, curd	CHOOSE	Protein-rich and filling.
Cucumber, carrot or tomato with a hung curd dip	CHOOSE	Crunchy with almost no sugar.
Guava or apple with a few nuts	CHOOSE	Fibre plus fat and protein slow absorption.
Biscuits, cookies and rusk, including 'digestive' ones	LIMIT	Mostly refined flour and sugar or fat.
Namkeen, chips, mixture, bhujia	LIMIT	Refined, fried and salty.
Sweets, chocolates and packaged cakes	LIMIT	Quick sugar with little fibre or protein.
'Diabetic-friendly' or sugar-free packaged snacks, granola, protein bars	LIMIT	Often still made of refined flour or sweeteners. Always read the label.
Fruit juice and soft drinks	LIMIT	Liquid sugar causes fast spikes.

10. When to Talk to a Doctor

Personalise it

Safety first: Diet is powerful but not a replacement for medical care.

SITUATION	WHAT TO KNOW	WHAT TO DO
On diabetes medicines or insulin	Diet changes can lower sugar and may need dose adjustments, so never change or stop medicines yourself.	Talk to your doctor.
Frequent urination, thirst, blurred vision, tiredness or sores that heal slowly	Possible signs of high blood sugar.	Get tested.
Dizziness, sweating, shakiness or confusion	Possible low blood sugar, especially on medicines.	Follow your doctor's plan and seek help if severe.
Pre-diabetes or family history	Early lifestyle changes can make a big difference.	Get regular HbA1c or fasting sugar checks.
Kidney, heart or other conditions	Diet needs may differ.	Consult a doctor or dietitian.
Not sure what works for you	Responses vary from person to person.	A dietitian or glucose monitoring can personalise this.

Note: This is general nutrition information written from general knowledge, not medical advice or a diagnosis. Blood sugar responses vary between people. Do not stop or change diabetes medicines on your own, and consult your doctor or a dietitian for a personalised plan.