

# Power Through Diabetes with Plants

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## November is Diabetes Awareness Month

This month communities and organizations across the country join together to bring attention to diabetes. A new report issued by the CDC in early 2020 found that 34.2 million Americans, over 1 in 10 people, have diabetes. And 88 million American adults, approximately 1 in 3, have prediabetes. To bring the point home, think about your own circle of family and friends. One of the 10 persons you know will develop diabetes, or 1 in 3, already has pre-diabetes.

## What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a group of diseases that result in too much sugar in the blood (high blood glucose). Insulin is a hormone produced by the pancreas that lowers blood glucose. Absence or insufficient production of insulin, or an inability of the body to properly use insulin causes diabetes.

There are two types of diabetes. Type 1 diabetes is a chronic condition in which the pancreas produces very little or no insulin. It is rare with less than 200,000 cases in the U.S. per year. Type 2 diabetes means that your pancreas does produce insulin but your body doesn't use the insulin correctly resulting in insulin resistance and high blood glucose levels. Type 2 diabetes is far more common, 90-95% of Americans with diabetes have type 2.

Pre-diabetes is when blood sugar is high but not high enough to be type 2 diabetes.

Pre-diabetes, without intervention, can likely become type 2 diabetes within 10 years. The tricky part is that many people with prediabetes have no symptoms. There are more than 3 million cases of pre-diabetes in the U.S. per year.

The good news is that both pre-diabetes and type 2 diabetes can be controlled or even reversed with lifestyle changes including healthful food choices and increased daily activity.

Recent research has shown that a plant-based diet can have a very favorable effect on pre-diabetes and type 2 diabetes.

## Why and what is a plant-based diet?

A plant-based diet focuses on foods primarily from plants. In addition to fruits and vegetables, this also includes nuts, seeds, oils, whole grains, legumes, and beans. Eating a plant-based diet doesn't mean that you are vegetarian or vegan and can never eat meat or dairy foods. Instead, it means that you are choosing more of your foods from plant sources. Plant-based diets offer all the necessary protein, fats, carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals for optimal health, and are often higher in fiber and antioxidants.

The Mediterranean Diet is an example of a plant-based diet. It emphasizes plant proteins but also includes fish, poultry, eggs, cheese, and yogurt a few times a week, with meats and sweets less often. And for the first time, it won the top spot as 2019's best overall diet in rankings by US News and World Report. **The Mediterranean diet also ranked first in best diet for diabetes and tied for first place in best heart-healthy diet.**

## 10 best plant-based sources of proteins

Typically, we think of animal sources as the best type of protein as they contain all the essential amino acids. But when approached carefully we can meet our protein needs exclusively from plant-based sources and without the saturated fat.

Here are some examples:

| Plant Protein     | Portion Size | Grams of Protein |
|-------------------|--------------|------------------|
| Lentils           | ½ cup        | 9                |
| Chickpeas         | ½ cup        | 7                |
| Hemp Seeds        | 3 Tbsp       | 10               |
| Tofu              | 3 ounces     | 8                |
| Nuts              | ¼ cup        | 6                |
| Quinoa            | 1 cup        | 8                |
| Nutritional Yeast | ¼ cup        | 8                |
| Tempeh            | 3 ounces     | 13               |
| Black Beans       | 1 cup        | 10*              |
| Peanut Butter     | 2 Tbsp       | 7                |

\*Same for all bean varieties

## Transitioning to a plant-based diet

As Americans, most of us were raised on “meat heavy” meals. It may feel intimidating to make the switch to a plant-based diet. But it doesn’t have to be accomplished all at once. Try to make small changes on a daily basis to include more plant-based foods. Here are some suggestions to help you get started:

- **Plate It:** Put fresh and cooked vegetables on half your plate
- **Beans instead of Beef:** Use beans for your entrée, try a [black bean burger](#): or a [vegetarian chili](#)
- **Roast It:** Pan roast an assortment of vegetables to enjoy during the week. [Here's a recipe](#)
- **Think Grains for Breakfast:** Start with oatmeal, quinoa, or barley. Add some nuts or seeds along with fresh fruit
- **Go for Greens:** Try a variety of green leafy vegetables such as kale, collards, Swiss chard, spinach, and other greens each day. Steam, grill, braise, or stir-fry with olive oil
- **Nature's Candy:** Some red grapes, a refreshing slice of melon, or a crisp apple will satisfy your craving for a sweet bite after a meal
- **One Day at a Time:** Start by going meatless one or two days per week, maybe try out the idea of Meatless Mondays

In summary, choosing more foods that are plant-based may help you lose weight, better manage diabetes, or prevent pre-diabetes from transitioning into type 2 diabetes.

