

# WHAT WE EAT MAY BE THE KEY

By Janis Roszler, RD, CDE, LD/N

For years, experts have urged people with a family history of type 2 diabetes to maintain a healthy weight and activity level. Being overweight and inactive were thought to be the main reasons why people developed this type of diabetes. But we now see that some people will still develop type 2 diabetes even if they are not overweight.

The question is: Why does this happen? Some experts believe it happens because of the foods we choose. A recent study in *Diabetes Care* looked at the ways different groups respond to diet changes. The researchers focused on two ethnic groups that are at a higher risk for type 2 diabetes—Native Hawaiians and Japanese Americans. Those in the Native Hawaiian group are often obese, but experts suspect their weight is not the only reason they get diabetes. Japanese Americans tend to stay slimmer, so why is their diabetes risk higher? What is the missing piece of the puzzle for both of these groups?

The researchers who did the study found that people in these two groups who ate a lot of fats, meats, eggs and refined grains, had a higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes. The study also showed that vegetables help protect some people from getting type 2 diabetes. Diets rich in fruit, milk and yogurt also were found to be very helpful, especially in women.



## \* Meats

Members of these two groups ate a lot of red and processed meats. Choose poultry in place of some of the red meat you enjoy. Ground turkey can be mixed into ground beef to make healthier meatballs or a meat loaf. Limit your intake of processed meats such as salami and bologna.

## \* Fruits and vegetables

As children, we often develop strong feelings about certain vegetables. Perhaps you still cringe when you think of Brussels sprouts or broccoli. As we age, our taste buds and feelings about different foods often mature. If you ate overcooked vegetables when you were small, you probably disliked the bitter taste. No foods taste good if they are not prepared well. Try different vegetables made in new ways. You may find that you like stir-fried veggies or raw carrots; many people do.

## \* Fats

The lesson of this research is moderation. It is true that there are healthy fats, such as olive and grape seed oils, but too much fat, of any type, is not a good thing. Before you prepare any food item, see if there is a way you can cook it with less fat. Bake, broil or lightly stir fry your meats and vegetables rather than deep frying. If you enjoy the flavor of cheeses that are high in fat, try a sprinkle of shredded cheese on your foods in place of sliced cheeses. You will get the flavor and cut back on the total amount of fat you consume.

## \* Eggs

If you enjoy eggs each morning, try something else such as hot cereal or yogurt as your breakfast choice a few days each week.

## \* Grains

Refined grains have had their fiber portion removed. White flour and some white rices are two examples of refined grain products. In place of these items, choose brown rice and products that are made from whole wheat flour.

*We still have a great deal to learn about diabetes and its causes, but cutting down on your intake of fat, red and processed meats, cheese, eggs and refined grains are steps that can take you in a healthier direction. Add regular physical activity to your day and you are well on your way to enjoying a healthier life.*