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# COSMOPOLITAN CLUB

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# Fruits and Diabetes: Friends or Foes?

Diabetes and pre-diabetes are some of the most rampant chronic diseases affecting humans today. It occurs when the pancreas does not secrete enough insulin or when the cells of the body become resistant to insulin. It is a predominantly lifestyle disorder in which the body struggles to control the levels of blood sugar but is unable to do so due to unhealthy eating, inadequate exercising and poor sleep and mental hygiene.

We all know that eating fruit is a delicious way to satisfy hunger and maintain a healthy lifestyle. Although we know fruits and vegetables are good for us, people with diabetes are often told they should avoid fruits because they are too sweet or contain sugar. All fruits contain natural sugars along with a good mix of vitamins, minerals and fibres. As a preventive cardiologist, the question that I get asked often is "I am diabetic, can I eat fruits?"

So, are fruits really advisable if you have diabetes or pre-diabetes?



July - 2025 | 10

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In this blog post, I hope to shed some light on the important issue of fruit intake for people with diabetes. First, let me explain two key concepts related to diet and diabetes: Glycaemic Index and Glycaemic Load.

## Glycaemic Index (GI)

GI is a number that gives you an idea about how fast your body converts the carbohydrates in a specific food into glucose. Two foods with the same amount of carbohydrates can have different glycaemic indices based on whether they contain more of simple sugars or complex sugars.

The smaller the number, the more time the body takes to convert it into glucose and so the more desirable for diabetic individuals.

**55 or less = Low (most desirable in diabetics)**

**56 to 69 = Medium (less desirable in diabetics)**

**70 or higher = High (least desirable in diabetics)**

The purpose of knowing the GI is to consume foods that are less likely to cause sudden steep increases in blood glucose levels. If you have diabetes, you must choose low GI foods in your daily diet. Research has proven that a low GI diet not only helps keep your blood glucose and blood cholesterol under control but also reduces insulin resistance and thereby the risk of complications like heart attack and stroke.

## Glycemic index of some fruits

Low GI	Medium GI	High GI
Apples	Mango	Watermelon
Pears	Banana	Dates
Grapes	Papaya	Dried fruits
Oranges	Figs	Chikoo
Strawberry	Pineapple	Jackfruit



## Glycemic Load (GL)

The GL of a food item is a number that indicates how much that food will raise a person's blood glucose level after eating it and it is mostly based on the glycemic index (GI). Large research trials have shown that people who consumed lower glycemic load diets were at a lower risk of developing diabetes and heart disease.

Foods with a GL below 10 are regarded as "low" and those with a GL above 20 as "high".

**Low GL foods:** Apples, Pears, Oranges, Grapes, Peaches, Strawberries, Tomatoes and Watermelon

**High GL foods:** Dates, Raisins, Dried fruits



Here's a look at some common myths and the actual facts about fruit intake and diabetes.

### **Myth – Fruits are not suitable for diabetic individuals**

**Fact –** If you want to manage your blood glucose, cholesterol level, blood pressure and body weight you must include fruits in your daily diet. In fact, most fruits have low to medium glycemic index.

### **Myth – Brown sugar, honey, palm sugar and sugar substitutes can be safely consumed**

**Fact –** All added sugars should be avoided. Alternatively, you can opt for a sugar-free

balanced healthy diet. Natural sugars are present in fruits, vegetables and milk so you can go with natural sugars instead of adding sugar to your diet.

### **Myth – Diabetic patients can eat special 'diabetic' foods available in the market**

**Fact –** 'Diabetic-friendly' labelling tends to be used on sweets, biscuits and similar foods that are generally high in fat and sugar. I wouldn't recommend eating sugar-free diabetic foods like diabetic sweets, biscuits and beverages. They have been found to worsen your diabetes and also lead to complications of liver, kidneys etc. Opting for natural foods is the best.

### **Myth – Fruit juices are safe for diabetic individuals**

**Fact –** Fruit juices are to be avoided mainly because they lack the goodness of fibre present in the whole fruit and quite often contain extra sugars and preservatives. Fresh home-squeezed juices without any added sugar and with the pulp are preferred to readymade juices. However, there is nothing to beat the fruit eaten as a whole.

### **Myth – You should stay away from chikoos, mangoes, jackfruits and bananas**

**Fact –** These fruits are by themselves a treasure trove of nutrition and there is no need to consider them a taboo. But portion size is very important while taking these fruits to manage your blood glucose levels. In fact, grapes and bananas are very beneficial because they are high in fibre, low in fat and full of vitamins and minerals. Mangoes too are rich in nutritive content. And all these fruits protect against heart disease, cancer and certain digestive problems.

The longstanding concern amongst our people is that fruits contain high levels of natural sugars which will inevitably increase

blood glucose level. Due to the low glycemic index of most fruits they do not lead to a sharp rise in blood glucose levels. In contrast, processed foods like white rice, white bread, maida products, packaged sugary drinks, fried snacks, chocolate, biscuits, cakes etc. have a very high GI and are definitely to be avoided.

My advice would be to keep a food diary to help track your fruit and vegetable consumption, as well as the other foods that you eat in a day. In this way, you can get professional help to ensure the intake of a well-balanced diet that helps nourish your body and keep your diabetes under control.

### Dietary Tips to Control Blood Glucose

- Consume whole fruits, with the skin, as much as possible
- Choose locally available seasonal fruits

and eat them fresh

- Add a wide variety of fruits – rainbow colours – in your daily diet to prevent chronic diseases like high blood pressure, heart diseases, stroke, obesity, constipation and certain cancers
- Limit the intake of nuts and dried fruits to a handful a day
- Avoid commercially available energy drinks, sodas and packaged drinks

Incorporating fruits into your daily diet is the best way to lower the risk of various health problems. Remember, a balanced healthy diet plan includes at least 5 portions of fruits and vegetables. I strongly recommend that you follow your healthcare provider's advice, monitor your blood sugar levels regularly and consult your physician or nutritionist before making any changes to your diet plan.



Cosmopolitan Club team comprising of S. VIJAYRAGHAVAN, N. NIRANJAN, V.N. RAMAMURTHY, R. SRIKRISHNAN. SRIDHAR and UMA won the All India Inter Club Bridge Tournament in Bangalore Club Chennai on 23rd and 24th of May. This tournament had the best 32 Teams across India and Cosmopolitan Club won this event.