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Get Constance Brown-Riggs' shopping list at [heartandsoul.com](http://heartandsoul.com).

by chandra r. thomas

**H**aving diabetes might seem like a lifelong sentence of dietary restrictions, but it doesn't have to be. Half the battle of staying on track is keeping the correct foods handy. Stocking your kitchen with the right items—more of the should haves than the should have-nots—will help you stick to a meal plan that'll keep your overall health in check and your blood sugar at optimal levels.

Even though store shelves are now stocked with a plethora of products touted as “diabetic-friendly,” don't get it twisted; fruits and vegetables, paired with lean proteins, are still the key components of a healthy diet. Don't fall prey to misleading and sometimes downright deceptive product labeling. Here are some expert suggestions for packing your pantry.

# Stocking Options

**P Protein** Beans, beans and more beans—everything from black-eyed peas to kidneys—are a great source of fiber, protein, potassium and antioxidants. Have them as part of a meal; plus “black bean salsa or hummus with whole-wheat pita or crackers are also great snack options,” Brown-Riggs says. When it comes to meat, look for leaner cuts, such as skinless chicken breasts, ground sirloin and ground round, she says. “Go for fish, chicken and beef, in that order.” Canned salmon, tuna and sardines packed in water are convenient, especially when there's no time to cook. Egg whites and egg substi-

whole wheat is best for pastas, rice and bread. “It has more nutrients and fiber that'll help you feel full longer,” Sanders-Butler says. Air-popped popcorn is great, but ban the butter and go for olive oil, Parmesan cheese or nutritional yeast on top. “If you know you're going to be bad with butter, just stay away,” she quips.

**P Dairy** Fortified soymilk and yogurt are quick, easy choices, but avoid brands with lots of added sugar. “You get the biggest benefit from Greek yogurt because it has a lot more protein, no fat and about 17 grams of carbs per serving size,” Brown-Riggs explains. “That's a bargain for the number of calories.” As for milk, go for low fat and skim. Keep string cheese around for a snack.

**P Beverages** Stock up on water and 100 percent fruit juice instead of sugar-free sodas. A lot of such products are made with sorbitol, sugar alcohol, which can cause severe diarrhea. Avoiding drinks containing high-fructose corn syrup may seem like a no-brainer, but also steer clear of ones with honey or the sweetener Agave, because both contain loads of carbohydrates and may elevate blood sugar, Sanders-Butler warns. Try sweetening lemonade or iced tea “with a natural sugar alternative such as Stevia,” she says. “It's an herb, it has no calories and it comes in a liquid or powder form. Plus it's been approved by the FDA.” ♥

## Creating a Diabetic-Friendly Kitchen

**P Vegetables** All veggies are great, but green ones like broccoli and asparagus and leafy ones like spinach and collards are ideal. “Think the colors of the rainbow when it comes to vegetables,” says Constance Brown-Riggs, dietitian and author of *Eating Soulfully and Healthfully With Diabetes*, “but note that starchier vegetables like white potatoes and corn contain more carbohydrates, which could adversely affect glucose levels. Keep those portions smaller.”

Fresh or bagged salad is a great option for an entrée or meal side, “but drizzle dressings of the vinaigrette variety on top, instead of the creamier ones which tend to be higher in fat,” says Yvonne Sanders-Butler, Ph.D., author of *Dessert Lovers' Choice: Naturally Sweet, Naturally Delicious*. Reduced-fat dressings have more sugar, so read labels carefully.

tutes will keep cholesterol in check. Stock up on small servings of nuts for a protein-packed snack or salad topping.

**P Fruits** Fresh fruit is ideal, but even canned or frozen versions with no added syrup are cool for snacks, dessert and smoothies. “Freeze fresh fruits like grapes and strawberries for a healthy satisfying snack,” Sanders-Butler says. Again portion control is important. “Even natural sugar can sometimes be too much for a diabetic,” she says. Brown-Riggs adds, “Have a smaller portion of fruit, like a banana or an apple, but leave the skin on for the extra benefit of fiber, which will help slow the absorption of sugar in the body.”

**P Pastas/Breads** Discriminate and be color-conscious with your carbs; the browner the better. Multigrain and

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