

Eating out is part of everyday life, maybe that's dinner at a friend's house or a meal at a restaurant, stop at a coffee shop or a takeaway. Whatever it is, you are likely to be facing different food choices, different ingredients, maybe more sugar than you would normally expect, different recipes and portions compared to the food that you eat at home. This can make carb counting a bit more challenging. Also, the change to your routine when you go out can affect your glucose levels. You might be out and about much later than usual, or maybe just a lot busier, dashing about getting ready. And of course, if you're having a drink, any alcohol that has carbs in it can also impact your glucose levels.

So what do you do? Well, it's often a question of guesstimating the carbohydrate in your meal. It might not be perfect, but checking the change in your glucose levels after a meal will help you understand how much insulin you need for that meal and give you a better guesstimate next time. To help you with your guesstimate, there are lots of reference sources online and on smartphone apps such as MyFitnessPal or Carbs & Cals. Many restaurants and takeaway chains also list the carbohydrate values of their menus on their websites. So you might find it useful to have a look at these ahead of time so you don't have to spend time trolling through everything at the dinner table.

Carbs & Cals is also a really useful visual guide showing the carb content in pictures such as a scoop of mashed potato, a bread roll, or maybe a portion of chips or rice on a plate, which you can match to the portion size that you're having. It's important to bear in mind though that your meal is unlikely to be exactly the same size, but it will provide you good information for a guesstimate value. Another method you could use to get an approximate value is to look at the nutrition content on the packaging of the supermarket foods or their takeaway ready meals. These can give you a bit of a guide to work from. Other ingredients can also indirectly affect your glucose levels. Takeaway and restaurant meals can be higher in fat compared to what you make at home. Fat slows down the absorption of carbohydrate from your stomach, which can mean that your insulin may hit your bloodstream before the carbohydrate has been fully absorbed.

Glucose levels can fall after eating and then rise considerably much later on even through the night for a meal such as pizza, fish and chips, rich creamy pastas or curries. Now, don't be surprised if you need a larger than usual dose of insulin for a high-fat meal, and also for one with a lot more protein, such as a portion of meat or chicken. In this case, it's a good idea to split the dose between the beginning and the end of the meal.

Keeping a food, insulin, and glucose diary when eating out can be helpful as you can use this information to remind yourself of your insulin doses for next time.

Giving your insulin 15 to 20 minutes before eating is recommended. But at a restaurant, you might want to see the food plated first so you can know the carb content. You can give separate insulin injections for each course you eat or bolus using an insulin pump. If you're unsure whether you'll eat everything and are concerned about hypos, you could delay the injection until you're finished eating.

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Hopefully, some of these tips will help you with carb counting when eating out. It's important to remember that it's not an exact science, so don't beat yourself up if your glucose levels are a bit erratic.

This transcript was exported on Jan 25, 2024 - view latest version [here](#).

Having type 1 shouldn't stop you from eating out and enjoying yourself, just requires a little extra thought and planning.