

Home (/) / What Can I Eat? (<http://dlife.com/category/what-can-i-eat/>) / Your Diabetes-Friendly Pantry

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# Your Diabetes-Friendly Pantry

Healthy foods to keep on hand year-round.



*By Sheila Buff*



Is it easy to find foods in your kitchen to make a quick, low-carb dinner? Do you keep the makings of a diabetes-friendly breakfast on hand? Can you quickly find a fulfilling, low-carb snack in your pantry? If you can, you're more likely to stick to your low-carb eating plan—and enjoy it. If not, you're in luck. Use these lists as a guide to stocking your low-carb, diabetes-friendly pantry.

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## Oils and Condiments

Use grapeseed oil to sauté and fry. For low-temperature cooking and salad dressings, choose extra-virgin olive oil. Add a small amount of flavored oils, such as toasted sesame, walnut, or avocado to salad dressings. Drizzle some over veggies and grains to add flavor and heart-healthy fat.

A variety of vinegars (/spoonful-vinegar-helps-sugar-go/) go along with your new oils. High-quality red or balsamic vinegar is great to add to salad dressing. White vinegar is good for making your own pickles. A splash of flavored vinegar brightens up the taste of steamed or sautéed green veggies. Also, vinegar is known to help keep blood sugar from spiking.

Other condiments to have on hand include:

- mustard
- mayo (not a reduced-fat version)
- hot sauce
- soy sauce
- low-carb or unsweetened ketchup

All add taste and interest to your food without extra carbs. Keep some pickles, olives, sun-dried tomatoes, and tomato salsa on hand. They can add a bit of variety to snacks and sandwiches.

A good variety of spices adds flavor to your food and lets you cut back on salt. Plus, spices have an array of health benefits. Good staples to have on hand include:

- hot pepper flakes
- black pepper
- chili powder
- oregano
- thyme
- basil



- cinnamon
- parsley

Five-spice powder is great if you like Asian flavors. Curry is good to have on hand for an Indian touch

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## Grains

To replace high-carb pasta, rice, instant noodles, breakfast cereals, and fake potatoes, stock up on whole grains. Good choices for the pantry include:

- **Steel-cut or old-fashioned oats (not instant):** Great for a hot breakfast or snack. Can also be used in place of breadcrumbs.
- **Oat bran:** Nature's cure for constipation, and a natural way to help lower cholesterol. Eat it as a breakfast cereal, sprinkle it on other cereals or veggies, or use in place of breadcrumbs.
- **Wheat germ:** Rich in vitamin E, magnesium (many people with diabetes lack this mineral), and fiber, wheat germ adds a nutty flavor to breakfast cereal, yogurt, casseroles, and veggies. Store away from direct sunlight.
- **Quinoa:** Easy to cook, packed with protein, stands in well for rice. Great in salads.
- **Pearl barley:** Barley has the lowest effect on blood sugar of any grain. It has a nice, chewy texture. Pearl barley is the most common type in grocery stores, but hull-less barely is even better for you.
- **Bulgur:** A form of cracked wheat, bulgur is a staple of Middle Eastern cooking.

**Tip:** Barley, bulgur, and quinoa all cook in 30 minutes or less.

If you have a variety of canned beans in the pantry, you can whip up a healthy salad, chili, casserole, curry, or soup quickly. Good beans include:

- garbanzos (also called chickpeas)
- red kidney beans
- pinto beans (great for chili)
- white beans
- black beans

Dried lentils and split green or yellow peas cook quickly, and are great in soups or casseroles.



Tips: To reduce the salt in canned beans and help reduce gas from eating them, empty the can into a strainer. Rinse the beans with running cold water. Dried beans cost less than canned, but are not as easy to use. Except for lentils and split peas, you'll need to plan ahead to soak them anywhere from a couple of hours to overnight before using.

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## Seeds and Nuts

Nuts (/slideshows/go-nuts/), nut butters, and seeds make great low-carb snacks. They are high in fiber, minerals, vitamins, and good fats. Toss some nuts or seeds into a salad or greens to add crunch and nutrition. Nuts to keep on hand include:

- almonds
- hazelnuts
- peanuts
- pecans
- pistachios
- walnuts

Good seed choices are sunflower and pumpkin seeds.

Tip: Choose unsalted versions, or make a mix of unsalted nuts and lightly-salted nuts. Avoid nut butters with added sugar. Nuts and seeds are good for you, but they're high in calories, so be aware of portion sizes. A standard nut portion is 1 ounce, about 20 nuts, or about 2 tablespoons of nut butter.

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## Tomatoes

Canned tomatoes and tomato paste are pantry staples. Choose brands with no salt and no sugar added.

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## Broth

Reduced-salt broths are great for making a quick soup. Add a can of beans, a cup or two of frozen veggies, and some chicken, and you've got a hearty meal that doesn't cost much.



## Canned Fish

Canned fish is easy, and fits into most budgets. It's also a great source of heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids. Choose brands that are packed in water. Varieties to have in your pantry include:

- tuna
  - salmon
  - mackerel
  - sardines
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## Vegetables

Canned veggies are handy, but have less nutrients and flavor than fresh or frozen veggies. They almost always have added salt. Still, in a pinch (or when the power goes out), canned veggies can be useful. Choose salt-free brands if you can. If you can't find salt free, rinse them in cold, running water to remove some of the added salt. Don't forget to keep a handheld can opener in your utensil drawer in case of a power outage.

If your pantry is cool, dry, and dark, you can store certain veggies in it. Below are some that last. (They also have plenty of disease-fighting compounds.)

- garlic
  - onions, shallots
  - ginger
  - winter squashes such as acorn, butternut, Hubbard, spaghetti
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## Fruit

You should only keep no-sugar-added canned fruit in your pantry. Look for unsweetened applesauce, pineapple, or mandarin orange segments. Even without added sugar, these aren't low carb foods. Make sure to read labels and count the carbs. Skip the dried fruits, such as raisins and dates. These sugary bits are sure to spike (/stop-the-spikes/) your blood sugar.



## Beverages

In your pantry, replace sugary soft drinks and fruit juices with flavored, no-calorie seltzer water and artificially-sweetened drinks that don't have an impact on your blood sugar.

Also include tea — green or black— in your pantry. Tea is full of natural chemicals that may reduce inflammation, lower your blood sugar, and help protect against diabetes.

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## Artificial Sweeteners

Sometimes, you will need table sugar for a recipe, but you should also have a sugar substitute in your pantry for when the need arises. You can use any of the common non-caloric sweeteners that don't impact your blood sugar, such as sucralose, stevia, or saccharin.

For use in drinks and the like, choose whatever tastes best to you. For cooking and baking, make sure to choose one that says it's made for those uses. Remember to use these in moderation, just like other ingredients.

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## Low-Carb Mixes, Shakes, and Bars

Today, you can find a wide range of low-carb products in any grocery store. You'll find low-carb cookies, baking mixes, shake mixes, and other choices. There are low-carb bars you can eat as snacks or in place of meals. Be cautious when you buy this stuff, and read the labels carefully. While some products are low-carb, many low-carb or high-protein bars are really just candy in disguise. Also, the artificial sweeteners used in candy and protein bars can upset your stomach if you eat too much.

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