

# A DIABETIC'S HAWKER FOOD SURVIVOR GUIDE

**Derrick Ong**  
Director, Eat Right Nutrition Consultancy

**For people with diabetes, eating out at hawker centres, coffee shops or food courts can be a tricky experience. This is because the hawkers and stall owners cook for the masses and tend to not pay much attention to portion size (particularly carbohydrate-rich dishes) as well as salt, oil, sugar through sauces and condiments. Most hawker dishes (with a few exceptions) tend to be low in fibre where vegetables and wholegrains are concerned.**

HOW TO GET AROUND LOCAL DELIGHTS WITHOUT SPIKING YOUR BLOOD SUGAR LEVELS!

## 1. Watch your carbohydrate exchange servings.

The general rule of thumb is that three dessert spoons of rice or noodles (minus the added meat/vegetables) is equivalent to a standard carbohydrate serve of 15 grams. Estimated carbohydrate needed for main meals i.e. lunch or dinner should be 45 to 75g (3 to 5 carbohydrate exchange servings), depending on one's calorie requirements. If you find that the carbohydrate serve in a dish is too large, order a smaller portion or share with someone. (Note: dessert spoons are smaller than tablespoons.)

## 2. Be aware of additional carbohydrate from directly added sugars

e.g. in rojak or sauces e.g. sweet and sour dishes, tomato or chili sauce, or gravies e.g. mee siam or soups e.g. prawn noodles. Try to limit your intake of these, or alternatively reduce your rice/noodle portion accordingly to compensate for the added sugars.



less sauce/oil



more vegetables,  
less soup/gravy & noodles



**3. Try to choose meals containing wholegrains or lower Glycaemic Index (GI) foods, where possible.**

These would make you fuller for a longer time and help control blood sugar levels. Examples of these include brown/red rice, brown rice vermicelli (bee hoon), basmati rice (in nasi briyani), chappati (containing wholemeal flour) and mung bean vermicelli (tung hoon)



basmati rice & wholegrain staples



**4. For nutritional balance, try to choose dishes with the three main food groups (grain, meat/protein and vegetables) present.**

Examples of these include lontong (minus the coconut gravy), economical rice or nasi padang (two vegetables and one meat/egg/tofu), yong tau foo (a classic set of six items should contain three vegetables and three non-fried protein items like beancurd and go easy on the sweet sauce and chilli), handmade noodles soup with extra vegetables, sliced fish soup with rice or noodles with added vegetables, or chicken rice set with vegetables.



more vegetables



**5. Go for dishes that employ healthier cooking methods such as steaming and boiling rather than fried or deep fried foods.**

Eating out can admittedly be a nutritional minefield for diabetics, but with proper planning, it can be a surprisingly enjoyable experience.



steamed/braised, not fried

