A FREE GUIDE FROM LIFESTYLE DOC

SWEET SPOT

Your guide to better blood sugar control through lifestyle



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A note from Dr Karen



Hello, and welcome!

Years ago, I was the patient. I weighed 112 kg and was living with pre-diabetes, high blood pressure, an under-active thyroid and PCOS. I know how it feels to be tired, frustrated and confused by conflicting advice.

Through small, sustainable lifestyle changes, I turned my health around.

Today, I help my patients do the same, and many have improved their blood sugar enough to reduce, or even stop, their diabetes medication, with careful medical supervision.

How to use this guide

- **Pick two changes, not ten.** Small steps, repeated every day, beat a dramatic overhaul.
- **Practise them for two weeks** until they feel normal, then add another.
- **Use the 7-day starter on page 10** to build momentum.
- **Work with your doctor,** especially if you take diabetes medication.

Why your blood sugar "sweet spot" matters

Every time your blood sugar spikes after a meal, your body works hard to bring it back down. When spikes happen several times a day, for years, they strain your blood vessels, your pancreas and your energy.

The good news: you have far more control than you think.

Most of the strategies in this guide are free, simple, and start with your very next meal.

Your blood sugar in 60 seconds

What happens after you eat, in plain language

When you eat carbohydrates (bread, rice, potatoes, pasta, cereal, fruit or sugar), your body breaks them down into glucose. Glucose enters your blood, and your blood sugar rises.

Your pancreas then releases **insulin**. Think of insulin as a key that unlocks your cells, so glucose can move out of your blood and into your muscles and liver.

Healthy

The key turns easily. Blood sugar rises gently and settles within a couple of hours.

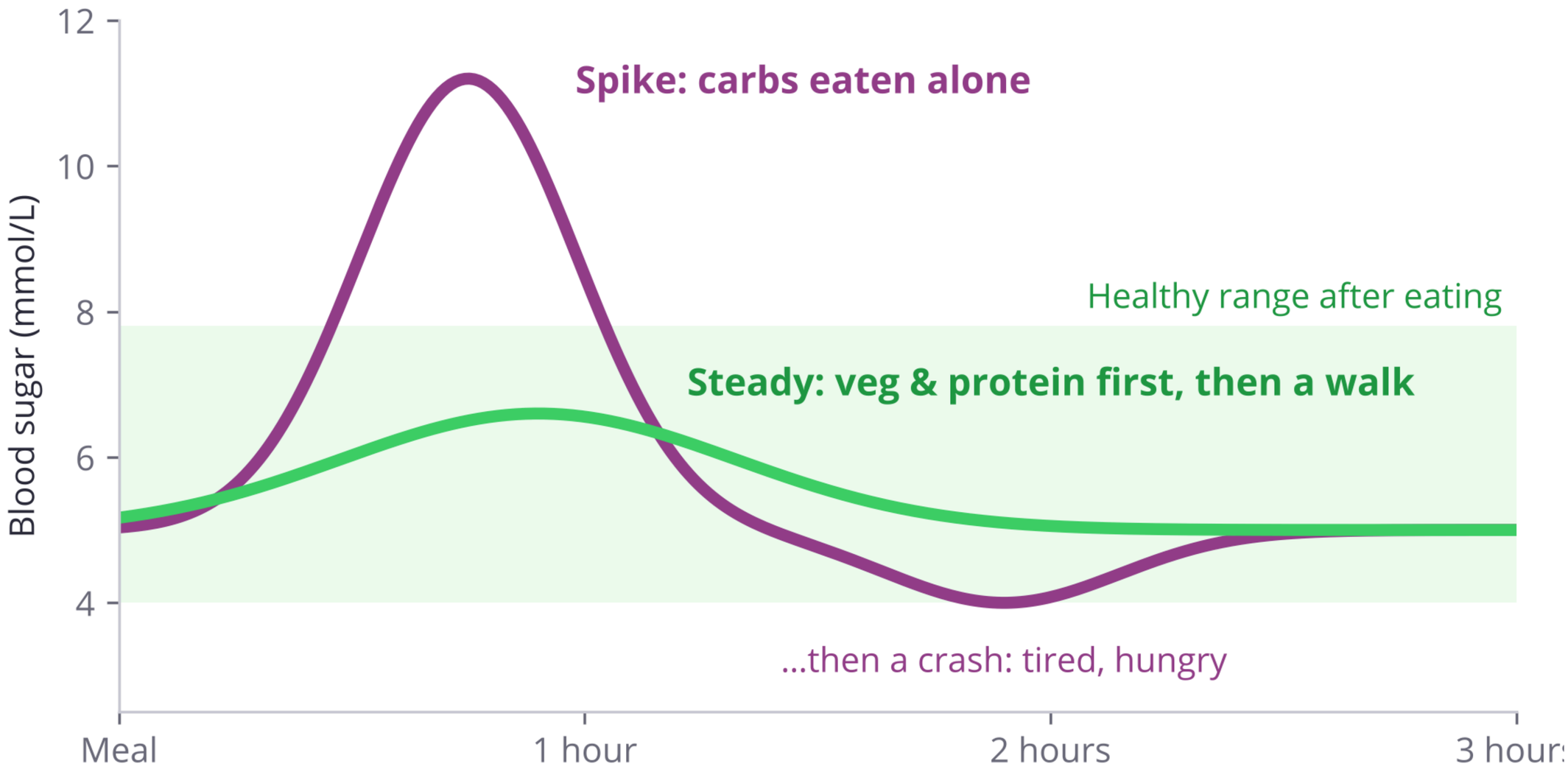
Insulin resistance

The locks are "stiff". Your body needs more and more insulin to do the same job.

Type 2 diabetes

The locks are so stiff that blood sugar stays high for longer, and rises higher.

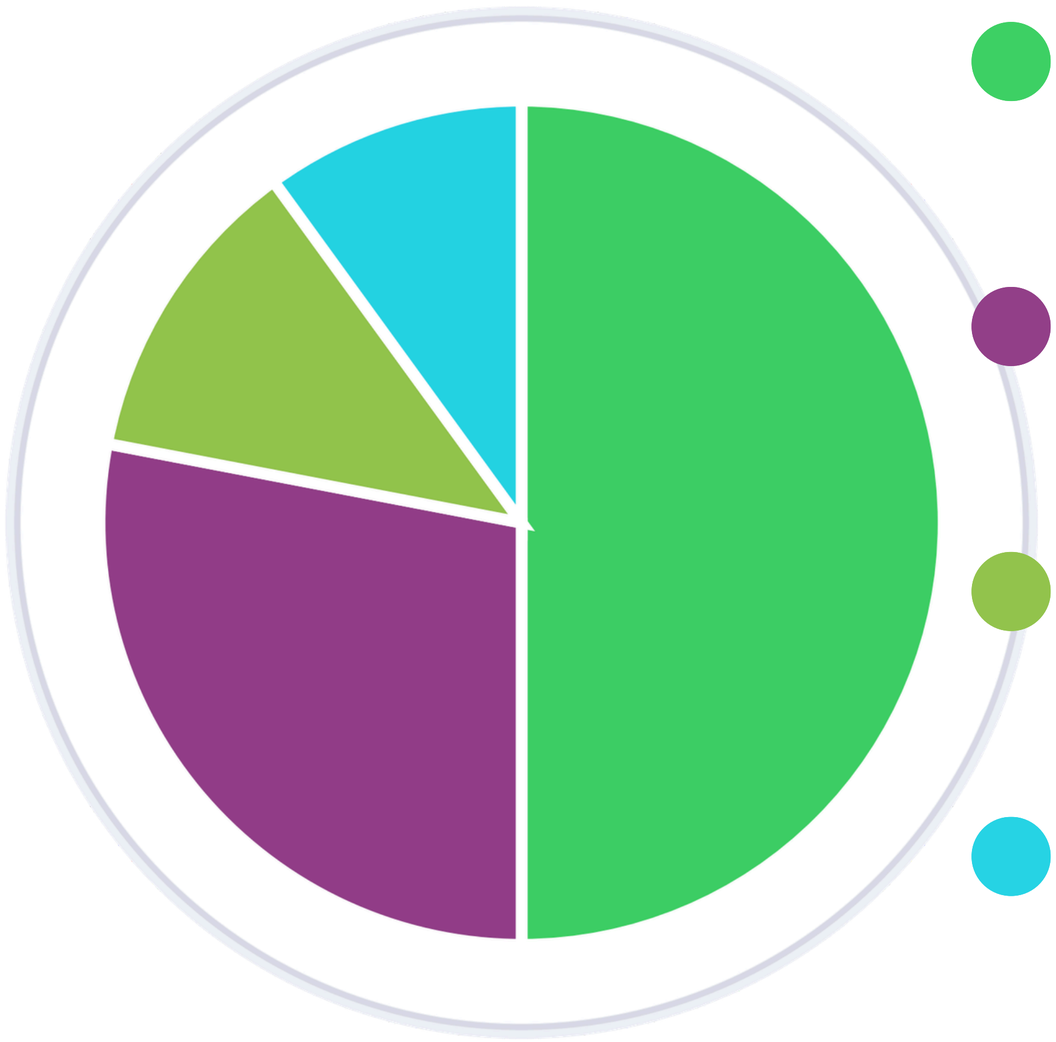
Mountain peaks vs rolling hills



A "spike" is a fast, steep rise in blood sugar after eating. The aim of this guide: turn sharp peaks into gentle rolling hills.

Build a Sweet Spot plate

No counting, no weighing: just look at your plate



About half: non-starchy vegetables
Salad, leafy greens, brèdes, broccoli, cabbage, chouchou, courgettes, aubergine, beans, peppers, tomatoes, mushrooms

About a quarter: protein
Eggs, fish, seafood, chicken, meat, cheese, plain yoghurt, tofu

A generous splash: healthy fats
Olive oil, avocado, nuts, seeds, olives

Small or none: starchy foods
If you include them, keep to ⅓ cup portion or less, and eat them last

Smart swaps

Instead of…	Try…
White bread or baguette	Lettuce wraps, or a thin slice of dense seeded bread
White rice	Cauliflower rice, or a small spoon of brown or basmati rice
Breakfast cereal or oats	Eggs with vegetables, or plain Greek yoghurt with nuts and seeds
Fruit juice or fizzy drinks	Water, sparkling water, herbal infusions, unsweetened tea or coffee
Biscuits, crackers, cake, pastries	A handful of nuts, cheese, olives, vegetable sticks with hummus
Instant noodles or pasta	Courgette ribbons, or a stir-fry with extra vegetables and protein

A friendly label isn't always a friendly food

"Diabetic-friendly" biscuits, ice creams and snacks are often still made from flour and starches that raise blood sugar.

Check the total carbohydrate on the label, not just the sugar.

Your Sweet Spot food lists

A simple guide to building your shopping list

Choose often

Build your meals around these

- Non-starchy vegetables: leafy greens, brèdes, lettuce, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, chouchou, courgettes, aubergine, green beans, peppers, tomatoes, cucumber, mushrooms
- Eggs
- Fish and seafood, including tinned sardines and tuna in water or olive oil
- Chicken, meat and lamb (unprocessed)
- Plain full-fat yoghurt and cheese
- Tofu and tempeh
- Nuts and seeds
- Olive oil, avocado, olives, butter or ghee
- Herbs, spices, garlic, ginger, chilli, lemon
- Water, herbal infusions, unsweetened tea and coffee

Enjoy in moderation

Small portions, eaten after veg and protein

- Lower-sugar fruit: berries, guava, citrus, kiwi, apples, pears
- Lentils, dholl, chickpeas and beans
- Pumpkin, carrots, beetroot, peas
- Small portions of brown or basmati rice, or dense seeded bread
- Milk
- Dark chocolate (85% or more)
- Sweet tropical fruit (banana, mango, pineapple, lychee): small portions, as dessert

Best avoided

These spike blood sugar fastest

- Sugary drinks, fruit juice, energy drinks and cordials
- Sweets, cakes, biscuits and pastries
- White bread, baguettes and large portions of white rice
- Breakfast cereals and instant noodles
- Dried fruit
- Sweetened and flavoured yoghurts
- "Diabetic-friendly" snacks made with flour
- Fried snacks and takeaways
- Processed meats
- Beer and sweet alcoholic drinks

Alcohol: if you drink, keep it occasional and with food. Alcohol can cause low blood sugar if you take insulin or sulphonylurea tablets, so ask your doctor.

Eat in the right order

Same food, smaller spike: it's all in the sequence

1

Vegetables or salad first

2

Protein and healthy fats next

3

Starchy carbs last, if at all

Fibre, protein and fat slow down how quickly your stomach empties, so by the time the carbohydrates arrive, there's already a "brake" in place. At a curry dinner: start with the vegetable side dish or salad, then the curry, and finish with a small spoon of rice or roti.

Never let carbohydrates go out alone

Instead of this alone…	Pair it with…
An apple	A small handful of almonds, or a spoon of peanut butter
Crackers	Cheese, tuna or avocado
A slice of toast	Eggs, smoked salmon with avocado, cream cheese, nut butter
Berries	Plain full-fat Greek yoghurt
A small sweet treat	Have it straight after a meal, never on an empty stomach

Fruit as dessert

Enjoy whole fruit at the end of a meal, when vegetables, protein and fat are already there to slow it down.

Choose berries, guava, citrus, kiwi, apples and pears more often.

Skip juice and dried fruit.

Optional extra: vinegar

1–2 tablespoons of apple cider vinegar in a large glass of water before a meal, or a vinaigrette on your salad, can modestly reduce the spike.

Never drink it neat.

Watch out for heartburn if you have reflux or ulcers, and rather have it with your meal.

Move your muscles

Your muscles are your body's biggest "sugar sponge"

When your muscles work, they pull glucose out of your blood to use as fuel, even without much help from insulin. Moving after a meal is like opening an extra exit door for sugar.



Walk after meals

A 10–15 minute walk within about 30 minutes of finishing your biggest meal. Walk the dog, walk with your family, or take a phone call on your feet.



Exercise snacks

2–5 minutes of movement instead of a food snack, or after sitting for an hour: 15–20 squats or sit-to-stands, calf raises, lunges, marching on the spot, or a few flights of stairs.



Strength twice a week

20–30 minutes using your bodyweight, resistance bands or weights. More muscle means more room to store glucose, and better insulin sensitivity.

Real-life result: one of my patients simply added five minutes of squats, calf raises or lunges after dinner. Six weeks later, her average blood sugar had dropped by about 2 mmol/L, with no other changes.

Sleep, stress and fasting

The hidden levers of blood sugar control

Protect your sleep

Even one short night can make your body more insulin resistant the next day, and increase cravings.

- Keep a regular bedtime and wake-up time
- Get morning daylight
- Screens off 30–60 minutes before bed

Calm your stress

Stress hormones like cortisol push blood sugar up, even when your food is on point.

- Take 5 slow breaths before meals
- Protect one quiet pocket of your day
- Move: a walk is a stress-reliever too

A gentle overnight fast

Giving your body a break from food gives it a break from insulin too. Start with a 12-hour overnight fast: for example, finish dinner by 7 pm and have breakfast at 7 am.

The simplest rule of all: the kitchen closes after dinner.

Taking diabetes medication? Talk to your doctor first.

Fasting, and some of the changes in this guide, can lower blood sugar quickly. Insulin, sulphonylurea tablets (such as gliclazide or glimepiride) and SGLT2 inhibitors (the "-flozin" medicines) may need adjusting before you start, to avoid dangerous lows or other side effects.

Know your numbers

Measure what matters, so you can see what works for you

HbA1c is a blood test that shows your average blood sugar over about three months. It's the best overall picture of how you're doing, so ask your doctor for your result, and how it compares with previous ones.

Blood sugar targets

Measure	Healthy (no diabetes)	Common target with diabetes
Fasting / before meals	4.0–5.5 mmol/L (72–99 mg/dL)	4.4–7.2 mmol/L (80–130 mg/dL)
2 hours after eating	Below 7.8 mmol/L (140 mg/dL)	Below 10 mmol/L (180 mg/dL)
HbA1c	Below 5.7% (39 mmol/mol)	Usually below 7% (53 mmol/mol), set with your doctor

Dr Karen's note

In my practice, I encourage patients to aim for blood sugar between 4.0 and 6.0 mmol/L (72–108 mg/dL) as much of the time as possible, before and after meals.

The closer your blood sugar stays to the normal range, the lower your risk of complications. If you take insulin or sulphonylurea tablets, aiming this low can cause hypos, so always agree your personal target with your doctor.

Test in pairs

Check just before a meal, then 2 hours after you started eating. A big jump means that meal is worth adjusting; a small rise means it's a keeper.

Change one thing at a time, and keep a simple log of what you ate and how you felt.

Ask your doctor

- What is my latest HbA1c, and my personal target?
- Should I check my blood sugar at home, and when?
- Could any of my medicines cause low blood sugar if I change my diet?
- Would a continuous glucose monitor help me?

Your 7-day Sweet Spot starter

One small new habit each day. Keep each one going as you add the next.

- [ ] **Day 1** Swap your breakfast for eggs with vegetables, or plain yoghurt with nuts and seeds.
- [ ] **Day 2** Eat your vegetables first at lunch and dinner.
- [ ] **Day 3** Take a 10-minute walk after your biggest meal.
- [ ] **Day 4** Swap juice or fizzy drinks for water, infusions or unsweetened tea.
- [ ] **Day 5** Make half your plate vegetables at dinner.
- [ ] **Day 6** Replace one food snack with a 2-minute exercise snack.
- [ ] **Day 7** Close the kitchen after dinner, and go to bed 30 minutes earlier.

My two Sweet Spot habits for the next two weeks

1. .....

2. .....

Keep going: Your next steps

Want to understand the "why" behind these strategies? Read the blogs:

Can Type 2 Diabetes Go Into Remission?
How one patient came off all his diabetes medicine | [blog link]

9 Simple Ways to Steady Your Blood Sugar
Practical strategies, starting with your next meal | [blog link]

Your Body, Your Data
How to use a continuous glucose monitor (coming soon) | [blog link]

Nutrition Basics PLUS

A 90-day guided programme to help you understand food, read labels and build balanced, blood sugar-friendly meals, at your own pace.

lifestyledoc.co.za/nutritional-basics

Intermittent Fasting PLUS

Ready to try fasting, with your doctor's blessing? Learn to fast gradually, safely and effectively over 90 days.

lifestyledoc.co.za/intermittent-fasting-plus

You're on the list! Look out for my emails with more practical tips, real patient stories and the latest evidence.

This guide is for general education and is not a substitute for personal medical advice. Please speak to your doctor before changing your diet, exercise or medication, especially if you take medication for diabetes. Case details have been changed to protect patient privacy.