



## Mind Your Food Environment

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

**Food advertisements, social media and grocery stores all influence our daily food choices.** Of the \$14 billion food companies spend on advertising each year, more than 80% promote ultra-processed foods, such as sugary drinks, fast food and candy. Unfortunately, high consumption of these foods is linked with an increased risk of developing heart disease, type 2 diabetes and cancer.

**Studies show that limited access to nourishing foods contributes to poor diet and increased disease risk.** Many areas of the country have **food swamps**, which means an overabundance of convenient, tasty, ultra-processed food, or **food deserts**, which have limited access to nutritious options. This is especially common in lower-income areas, where it is easier and cheaper to buy chips and candy than carrots and bananas.

**Here are some things you can do to navigate a fast food-heavy environment:**

- **Choose water most often.** Water is healthier and is sold near sugary beverages.
- **Find alternatives.** Fast food is fine on occasion, but fast-casual restaurants that offer salads, sandwiches and grain bowls are often better options.
- **Take a snack.** It's easier to ignore the lure of candy bars and donuts if you've packed a satisfying snack, such as trail mix or an apple.
- **Grocery shop with a list.** Marketing is abundant in supermarkets. You'll make fewer impulse purchases if you stick with your shopping list.
- **Limit exposure to food advertising.** Block social media ads promoting ultra-processed food. Watch ad-free programming when possible.
- **Be skeptical.** Value-sized packages, upsized portions or the allure of fast-food places being open late are marketing tactics that tempt us to overconsume ultra-processed foods.

## Omega Fat Matters

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

**Omega-3 and omega-6 fats are two types of essential polyunsaturated fats.** *Essential* means we need to get them from food since the body can't make them on its own.

**North Americans get plenty of omega-6 fats from corn and soybean oils,** which are abundant in the food supply. But omega-3 fats are harder to come by. While it would be ideal to get a ratio of 4:1 omega-6 to omega-3 fats, most people get closer to 20:1. This high ratio has been linked to heart disease, obesity, asthma and inflammation.

**How can you get more omega-3 fats?** There are three main types of omega-3 fats in foods:

- Alpha-linolenic acid (ALA).
- Docosahexaenoic acid (DHA).
- Eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA).

**ALA omega-3 fats are found in plant-based foods, such as walnuts, canola oil, chia and flax seeds.** DHA and EPA are abundant in fish, such as salmon, trout and sardines. Vegans can get DHA and EPA from algae or seaweed. **Did you know?** Fish are high in omega-3 because they eat so much algae.

**To fix the ratio, any of those omega-3 sources are fine.** But for advanced health, most research focuses on EPA and DHA, which have more health benefits than ALA.

**During pregnancy and infancy,** DHA is important for the normal development of the baby's brain, eyes and nerves. In adulthood, DHA and EPA are important for reducing the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure and stroke. For older adults, sufficient DHA and EPA correlates with a lower risk of developing Alzheimer's disease and cognitive decline.

**Aim to eat two to three servings of fatty fish each week.**

If you don't enjoy fish, speak with your health care professional about DHA and EPA supplements.





# Prediabetes Action Plan

If you have prediabetes, your blood glucose (sugar) levels are higher than normal, but not yet high enough to be diagnosed as diabetes.

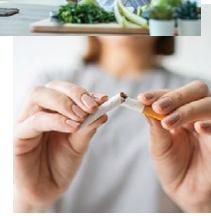
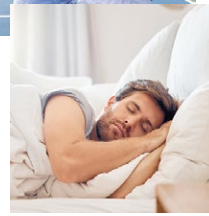
Prediabetes is a serious condition that can lead to type 2 diabetes, heart disease and stroke.

**Prediabetes, usually begins with insulin resistance — when the liver, fat and muscle cells do not use insulin properly.** Eventually, the body needs more insulin than it can produce, causing blood glucose to rise and causing serious health problems without proper management.

## Risk factors for developing prediabetes:

- Obesity, an underlying cause of insulin resistance.
- Age beyond 45.
- Exercising fewer than three times a week.
- Family history of type 2 diabetes.
- Giving birth to a baby that weighed more than nine pounds.
- Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), a hormonal disorder in women.

**Prediabetes can often be reversed to lower the risk of developing type 2 diabetes** — a condition that can cause heart disease, chronic kidney disease, nerve damage and other problems with feet, oral health, vision, hearing and stress.



## If you have prediabetes, take these actions now:

1. Get at least 30 minutes of physical activity most days of the week. Include strengthening workouts.
2. Eat a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts, whole grains and olive oil is linked with a lower risk of developing prediabetes. Cut back on ultra-processed foods, such as soda, salty snacks and fast food.
3. Lose excess weight. Extra pounds can lead to the development of insulin resistance. If you're overweight, losing just 5% to 7% of your body weight — about 14 pounds if you weigh 200 pounds — can significantly reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes when you maintain the weight loss.
4. Get adequate sleep. Experts recommend seven to nine hours daily.
5. If you smoke, quit. Smokers are 30% to 40% more likely to get diabetes than nonsmokers, according to the FDA.



## Q: Flu vaccine safety?

**A:** The flu shots recommended each fall for everyone aged six months and older have an excellent safety profile, according to the CDC. You cannot catch the flu from a flu shot since they're prepared from inactivated viruses. The nasal vaccine will not cause influenza either since it contains live, weakened viruses.

**Despite the good safety record, adverse effects can occur.** Most common are injection site redness or soreness, fever, muscle aches, headache or fatigue. The side effects are usually mild and resolve on their own in a few days. Patients can report adverse reactions to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System at <https://vaers.hhs.gov/reportevent.html>.

**Certain people should not get a flu shot.** Talk to your health care provider if you have an allergy to eggs or other vaccine ingredients, or if you have ever had Guillain-Barre Syndrome. The CDC also advises those who are moderately or severely ill should wait until they recover before receiving a flu vaccine. — Elizabeth Smoots, MD

## QuikRisk™ Assessment: Screen Time

Do you ever wonder if you're spending too much time viewing screens?

Answer the questions below:

- T  F 1. Smartphones, TVs or other screens keep me from getting a good night's sleep.
- T  F 2. I'd get involved in other activities if I weren't using screens so much.
- T  F 3. Social media use, computer games or other online activities make me less productive at work.
- T  F 4. Even when not working, I spend six or more hours daily using screens.
- T  F 5. At mealtime, I don't really notice the amount or taste of my food because I'm busy watching screens.
- T  F 6. I become irritable or impatient when I can't use electronic devices.
- T  F 7. Screens often distract me during conversations.
- T  F 8. When I'm bored or upset, I cope by using electronic devices.
- T  F 9. I exercise less than I should because of my screen use.
- T  F 10. My screen use often substitutes for in-person social contact.

If you answered True to some of these questions, examine your screen use.

Excessive screen time — especially more than six hours per day — has been linked to depression. Consider carving out screen-free times (e.g., mealtimes) and enjoying unplugged activities, such as exercising and socializing.



The **Smart Moves Toolkit**, including this issue's printable download, **Tips to Prevent Burnout**, is at [personalbest.com/extras/23V11tools](https://personalbest.com/extras/23V11tools).