

Functional Foods

The best way to manage your diabetes is by eating a healthy diet, being physically active, and taking medication as prescribed. You may wonder about adding a *functional food* to your regimen. The information below should help you to decide.

What is a functional food?

Based on the definition of the Institute of Medicine, US National Academy of Sciences, the Canadian Diabetes Association defines functional foods as “those foods in which one or more ingredients have been changed to enhance/improve their role in a healthful diet.” Some of the foods which fit this definition are Omega-3 enriched eggs and probiotic yogourts. Functional foods may cost more than foods without these added ingredients, but may not add anything to your diabetes management.

The tips below will help you to decide if a “functional food” should be added to your diet to help you manage your diabetes.

Answer the following questions, and then compare your answers to the desired answers given. (The information referred to in Questions 2 and 3 may be found on the product package, in advertisements, or on a website.)

Question	Your answer			Desired answer
1. Is the product made by a reputable company, one that you trust?	Yes	No	Not Sure	YES. Often reputable companies are more able to spend the time and money needed to research health claims about food. If you are not sure about the company, you may wish to discuss this with your healthcare professional.
2. Is any medical information provided based on scientific study?	Yes	No	Not Sure	YES. Keep in mind that scientific studies and research are more trustworthy than “first-hand” experience.
3. Do the health claims seem “too good to be true”, or does the product claim to be an amazing “cure all”?	Yes	No	Not Sure	NO. There is no one, miracle food that by itself will help you to manage your diabetes.
4. Does the product label explain how many servings you need to eat and how to fit it into your diet?	Yes	No	Not Sure	YES. It is important to know how much you need to eat. Some ingredients will require very large doses or daily doses in order to gain the desired health benefit.

5. Is the product sold as part of a “package” of products?	Yes	No	Not Sure	NO. When making healthy food choices, you should not have to purchase a lot of “other” products, such as supplements, books or gadgets.
6. Have you discussed using the product with your healthcare professional?	Yes	No	Not Sure	YES. It’s always best to talk with your healthcare professional first. You can discuss any medical conditions or concerns you may have. It is a way to find out if the food product will be a benefit to your health.

Give yourself one point for every question to which you gave the desired answer. You should only consider trying the product if it scores a perfect 6.

Remember there are no foods that will magically manage your diabetes. Wholesome, tasty foods combined with regular activity and medication is the best way to manage your diabetes and help you meet your nutritional needs.

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Adapted from “Winning the game of losing” 1991, Canadian Dietetic Association