

## DESSERTS OF INDIA

Desserts are often used to convey gratitude, affection, respect, joy and reward. India with its rich heritage and diversified culture also varies a great deal in sweet preparations. Sweets are either prepared at home or eaten out (not limited to any one occasion). Most common are parties, lunch/dinner invitations, birthdays, festivals, anniversaries and, in general, eating out. There are numerous homemade and traditional sweets or desserts prepared which vary from region to region and place to place. They are usually passed on from generation to generation. The most common preparations that are region-specific but not limited to, are as follows:

- **North India/Nepal:** Kheer, Gulaab Jammun, Kulfi, Halwa (Suji or Gaajar or dhudhi), Mahi  
**South India:** Payasam, Sweet Pongal, Laddu  
**East India:** Rosogolla, Misti doi, Pithe, Sandesh, Rasmalai  
**West India:** Besan Laddoos, Shrikhand

Irrespective of the region one belongs to, the main ingredients that are used in these preparations are sugar and milk and fats or oils. These ingredients are a source of carbohydrate and calories and must be eaten cautiously.

The first ingredient is usually sugar, a simple carbohydrate that is absorbed in the blood stream very quickly and raises blood sugar. It is a concentrated source of calories (1 tsp or 5 gms = 20 calories) and therefore is referred to as a Calorie Sweetener as compared to a non-caloric sweetener such as 'Sweet and Low' or 'Equal'. Portion control is one big key to successfully manage diabetes.

The second ingredient most commonly used in the preparation of sweets and desserts is milk. The many homemade products that use milk are plain and sweetened yogurt, condensed milk fudge (khoa), fresh chenna and paneer cheeses, ghee and clotted cream. However most of these products when prepared from whole or even low-fat milk can raise blood cholesterol or contribute to heart disease. Most of the desserts or sweets are prepared by either whole milk or half-and-half for rich and creamy taste.

### Modifications/Tips

1. Use Non-Calorie Sweetener in the preparation of sweets and desserts. Reduce the portion sizes. Use 1/4 the amount of sugar suggested in the recipe and add the rest with non-calorie sweetener if you cannot make the entire dish with non-calorie sweetener.
2. Try using canola or olive oil for frying (less saturated fats). Shallow frying is better than deep frying and using a non-stick pan usually consumes less oil. Cooking spray equally does well and is recommended for shallow frying.
3. Use 1% milk to make Mahi, Kheer, Payasaam, Halwa, yogurt for Shrikhand and Mistidoi, chenna for Rosogolla and Sandesh, paneer cheeses, custard and pudding.
4. Squeeze the syrup out from Rosogolla, Gulab Jamun and other sweets that are immersed in sugar syrup.
5. Try to eat only half or one piece depending on the size if the recipe is not modified. Often sweets are served as a form of prasad or prasadam in places of worship. Learning to eat smaller portions is always helpful.
6. Use lowfat or fat-free evaporated milk and unsweetened condensed milk if a recipe calls for regular condensed milk.

7. Monitor total Carbohydrate content
8. It is also a good practice to read labels and to look for total fat, sodium, and cholesterol content when buying a product if the nutrition information is available.
9. Remember to count dessert as a carbohydrate source and make appropriate adjustments in the diet and insulin intake where applicable.
10. Self monitoring of blood glucose (SMBG) is recommended to keep a track of your blood sugars. If it is high before a meal, passing the desserts may be a good idea. Generally, “Blood Sugar” and “Blood Glucose” refer to the same measure. Blood glucose is the value that indicates glucose content in the blood when tested. Fasting blood glucose levels refer to the blood test that is done in the morning before any food is eaten while Post –Prandial or Post meal is done 1½ to 2 hrs after eating a meal.

**Sharmila Chatterjee, MSc, MS, RD is a Registered dietitian. She is the Nutrition Consultant for the California Diabetes and Pregnancy Program called “ Sweet Success” for Region 9 (San Diego and Imperial county). She also is the Out-Patient Dietitian for University of California San Diego (UCSD) Medical Center. She is a member of American Dietetics Association as well as member of its Diabetes Practice Group. She can be reached at schatterjee@ucsd.edu (W) or arscb@san.rr.com (H).**

### **References**

1. Jorge Salmeron, etal: Dietary Fiber, Glycemic Load, and risk of Non-insulin dependent diabetes mellitus in women. JAMA, 277 (6), 1997.
2. Madhur Jaffrey: Flavors of India. West Publishings. 1995.
3. Evidence Based Nutrition principles and Recommendations for the treatment and prevention of Diabetes and related complications. Diabetes Care; 25 (1), 2002.
4. Sharad Pendsey: Practical management of Diabetes. Jaypee Brothers Medical Publishers. 1997.