

Healthy Eating

All About Carbohydrates

The relationship between carbohydrates and people with diabetes can be confusing. Let's take a look at what carbohydrates are and how to fit them into a delicious, nutritious eating plan.

All food is made up of a combination of three nutrients. Carbohydrate, protein, and fat. Carbohydrates (carbs) are an important source of vitamins, minerals, phytonutrients, and in many cases, fiber, all of which support good health. They are the preferred energy source for the brain. However, carbs are also the nutrient that affects blood glucose the most. Given all of the benefits of carbohydrates, we don't want to cut them out of our diet altogether, but we do want to be sure to choose the healthiest carbs in the right amount.

Carbohydrates are made up of three components: starch, fiber, and sugar. Starch and fiber are complex carbs, while sugar is a simple carb. Between the two, complex carbs are the clear winner!



Complex carbs are typically more nutrient-dense than simple carbs. They take longer to digest, and this gradual digestion process results in a slower release of glucose into the bloodstream. This helps maintain stable blood glucose levels and provides fuel for physical activities. Additionally, complex carbs are often rich in fiber, which aids in digestion, promotes satiety, and can help maintain healthy cholesterol levels.

Good sources of starch and fiber include:

- whole fruits,
- starchy vegetables such as corn and sweet potato,
- legumes such as lentils, black beans, kidney beans and pinto beans
- whole grains such as brown rice, quinoa or barley
- whole grain breads and crackers.

Simple carbs are quickly digested and absorbed and are often responsible for quick spikes in blood sugars after meals or snacks. Simple carbs are found in added sugars such as table sugar, candy, sweets, and sodas. These foods have little nutritional value. On the other hand, fruits and milk are also considered simple carbs but contain important vitamins and minerals and in the case of milk, protein as well.

Choosing the right carbs can take time and practice. With a little bit of information and a keen eye for nutrition labels, you can start making healthier choices to energize your body, fuel your brain, and protect yourself from long-term complications.

**KEEP
YOUR
DIABETES
ON A
STABLE
PATH**

Building a Healthy Plate

To have a conversation about building a healthy nutritious meal around carbohydrates, it helps to have a carbohydrate goal to aim for. While everyone is different when it comes to their carbohydrate goals based on their personal preferences, lifestyle, schedules, and health conditions, following the diabetes plate format is a reasonable place to start.

A healthy plate starts with attention to portions. By starting with a nine-inch plate you are automatically controlling the size of the meal. Fill half of the plate with non-starchy, colorful vegetables, a quarter of the plate would include a carbohydrate, such as a serving of sweet potato or corn, a serving of whole grains, or a serving of rice and beans, and the final quarter of the plate would be a protein source such as chicken, fish or tofu.



There are healthy plate formats available for a variety of cultures through the American Diabetes Association <https://shopdiabetes.org/collections/the-diabetes-placemat>

Checking your blood glucose before a meal and then again 1-2 hours after the meal will give you some great feedback on the choices you made and can help guide your choices in the future. Although you may have a different goal established with your provider, a general target for pre-meal glucose is 80-130. If you are in your target range before a meal, ideally your glucose 1-2 hours after the meal should be less than 160-180.



If you are comfortably within your target range, there may be room to add an additional carb serving. Continue to experiment with the paired tested before and after meals to learn how different foods and portions affect your glucose levels.

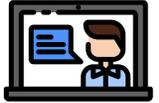
In the world of diabetes, foods that contain 15 grams of carbohydrates are considered one carb serving. See the link below for a list of carb foods and serving sizes.

<https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/managing/eat-well/diabetes-and-carbs/carbohydrate-choice-lists.html>

To put it all together check out these great recipe ideas from the Diabetes Food Hub

<https://www.diabetesfoodhub.org/all-recipes.html>

Coach's Corner



Dear Coach,

My friend was telling me that she calculates Net Carbs on the label. What are net carbs and is that a better way to track my carbohydrate intake?
Confused in Central Florida

A: Dear Confused,

This is a great question! The American Diabetes Association shares the following information when it comes to Net Carbs. While you might see it on some food packaging, the term "net carbs" does not have a legal definition and is not used by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) or recognized by the American Diabetes Association (ADA). The FDA and the ADA recommend using total carbohydrates on the nutrition facts label.

"Net carbs" are determined by subtracting any fiber or sugar alcohols on the label from the total carbohydrates.

This is assuming that fiber and sugar alcohols are not absorbed or metabolized, but this is not always true. Some are partially digested and therefore still provide calories as well as impact blood sugar.

The equation used to calculate net carbs is not entirely accurate because the contribution of fiber and sugar alcohols to total carbohydrates depends on the types present. Because the type of fiber or sugar alcohols used is not indicated on the nutrition facts label, the effect on blood glucose and possible insulin therapy adjustments cannot be determined precisely.

For this reason, we recommend using the total grams of carbohydrate and closely monitoring your blood sugar when consuming foods high in fiber or sugar alcohol to determine how they affect your body.

Interactive label reading information link below

<https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/interactivenutritionfactslabel/default.cfm>

COACH SUPPORT:

Reach out when you have a question or concern.

You don't have to wait for your scheduled appointment.

Three ways to reach us: email, phone, SMS text