



Confused About Carbs?

Carbohydrates are a diverse group of foods. It's likely you have heard many different things about carbohydrates. Let's set the record straight to dispel any confusion you may have about this nutrient.

What do carbohydrates do for your body?

- Provide energy – your body breaks down carbohydrates into glucose which is used to fuel cells.
- Help maintain muscle mass – adequate carbohydrates in the diet are used for energy instead of protein, of which muscles are made.
- Provide fiber – fiber plays an important role in maintaining bowel health, heart health, and healthy blood sugar and blood pressure ranges.

Where do you find carbohydrates?

- Grains
- Legumes (beans, lentils, peas, peanuts)
- Nuts
- Starchy vegetables like corn, potatoes, plantains, and winter squash
- Non-starchy vegetables
- Fruits
- Dairy products like milk and yogurt
- Sugary foods and drinks

Should you avoid all carbohydrates?

No. Given all the benefits listed above, you should not avoid all carbohydrates. They are the body's preferred source of energy and fiber plays a critical role in your overall health.

Do carbohydrates help with weight loss?

Have you heard that you need to eat “low carb” or “no carb” to lose weight? While portion control is important, you should not avoid all carbohydrates to lose weight. High fiber carbohydrates are low in calories and high in nutrition; they keep you full and stop you from overeating. So focus on including certain types of carbohydrates, specifically complex carbohydrates, with your meals and snacks.

What are complex carbohydrates?

Carbohydrates are made up of three components: fiber, starch, and sugar.

Fiber and starch are complex carbohydrates, while sugar is a simple carbohydrate. The body breaks down complex carbohydrates more slowly than simple carbohydrates. The fiber, starch, and sugar content of a food determines if it is a simple or complex carbohydrate.

Focus on complex carbohydrates – think of these as “slow carbs.” They are nutrient-dense and high in fiber; they are digested more slowly, which leaves you feeling full longer.

Limit or avoid simple carbohydrates – think of these as “fast carbs.” They are broken down quickly, which leaves you feeling hungry sooner than complex carbohydrates would.

Slow Carbs	Fast Carbs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Beans, lentils, split peas• Whole grain bread, pasta, cereal• Oats, brown rice, bulger, quinoa• Non-starchy vegetables• Whole fruit• Potatoes, yam (with skin)• Squash (butternut, acorn)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• White bread, white pasta, tortillas• White rice• Instant oatmeal, cornflakes• Highly processed snack foods (crackers, pretzels, chips)• Sweet desserts, candy• Soda, juice, sugar sweetened beverages

What are some good rules of thumb to remember?

- Aim to include 2 servings of carbohydrates (fiber) at each meal and 1 serving of carbohydrate (fiber) at each snack. At least 1 of the servings at the meals should include a non-starchy vegetable.
- Non-starchy vegetables may be eaten in unlimited amounts.
- Budget tips: Produce in season will be least expensive and frozen produce will keep for a long time without spoiling.

What are some standard portions?

- 1 cup raw or ½ cup cooked vegetables
- ½ cup cut fruit
- ½ medium banana
- 1 small apple or peach
- 1 slice bread
- 1 small potato (3-oz)
- 1 tortilla (6” corn or flour)
- 1/3 cup rice or ½ cup pasta
- ½ cup cooked beans or oatmeal
- ¼ cup dried fruit
- 4 ounces juice
- 10-15 chips (tortilla or potato)
- 1 medium cookie (3” in diameter)
- ½ cup ice cream

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