



Nutrition Basics

Carbohydrates: You need them!

Chapter 2, Lesson 1



Carbs come in many forms,
and some are healthier than others.

Carbohydrates: You need them!

Carbohydrates have a bad reputation. Many people think that in order to eat healthy, lose weight or prevent diabetes, they need to eliminate or drastically reduce the amount of carbs they eat. In reality, not all carbs are equal.

Why they are important?

- Provide your body with energy
- Promote good digestion
- Fuel your central nervous system—your brain!
- Serve as fuel during exercise and physical activity, helps spare protein and preserves muscle mass during exercise

When considering carbs, the type you choose is more important than the amount you eat!

Complex carbs are “healthy” carbs. They contain plenty of nutrients and fiber, which prevents food from being absorbed too quickly and spiking blood sugar levels.

Examples include:

- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Whole grains
- Legumes (beans, peas and lentils)

Simple carbs are “unhealthy” since they contain fewer nutrients and add the most calories. They should be a limited part of your diet since they break down quickly and can cause spikes in blood sugar levels.

Examples include:

- Refined breads and grains, such as white bread and white rice
- Foods with added sugar

Grains

Contrary to popular belief, grains are an important part of a healthy diet (if you don't have underlying health conditions that affect your ability to digest/eat them).



At each meal, ¼ of your plate should consist of grains. When choosing grains, make half of your grains whole.

Whole grains contain many vitamins and nutrients that refined grains lack since they contain all three parts of the grain kernel—the bran, germ and endosperm.

Refined grains are processed to remove the bran and the germ to create a finer texture and lengthen shelf life. When grains are processed and refined, they lose valuable nutrients.

Try these tips to eat more whole grains:

- Enjoy a whole grain cereal, toast or oatmeal for breakfast
- Substitute a whole grain like brown rice for white potatoes or white rice.
- Try whole wheat pasta
- Swap your refined grain products for whole grain products. For example, use whole wheat tortillas rather than white
- Choose foods that are naturally whole grains, like oatmeal, bulgur, or buckwheat

Fruits and vegetables

Eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables can provide you with many of the nutrients needed to maintain a healthy body. When choosing fruits and vegetables, the best thing you can do to ensure a wide range of nutritional benefits is to “eat the rainbow.”



At each meal, ½ of your plate should be fruits and vegetables.

A word about sugar

Sugar is a carbohydrate. Similar to grains, there can be some confusion in regards to sugar. Sugar falls into two categories:

Natural sugar: Occurs naturally in fruits, vegetables and dairy. Usually accompanied by fiber, fat and/or protein, which help to slow the release of glucose into the bloodstream

Added sugar: Added to foods during processing for taste. Increases calories; no nutritional value. Causes a rapid rise and fall in blood glucose levels

Next Steps

1. Watch Lesson 2: 8 Sneaky Signs Your Body Needs More Carbs
2. Watch Lesson 3: Squeeze More Fruits and Veggies into Your Diet
3. Take Chapter 2 Quiz

Sources

United States Department of Agriculture (2020). Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025. https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/Dietary_Guidelines_for_Americans_2020-2025.pdf