

Carbohydrate Common Sense

Contrary to popular belief, people with diabetes can eat carbohydrates! In fact, many of the foods that provide health promoting nutrients that combat chronic disease also contain carbohydrates. The key to responsible carbohydrate consumption is choosing the right types of carbs and being mindful of the quantity. In other words, with just a little carbohydrate common sense, you will be able to enjoy carbs with pride, and without guilt!



What Are Carbohydrates, Anyway?

Carbohydrates are one of the major three macronutrients found in food. They consist of sugars, starches and fibers. After carbohydrates are consumed, they are broken down into simple sugars (glucose) in the body, absorbed into the bloodstream and used for energy. Carbohydrates include:

- Starches (potatoes, peas, legumes, corn and whole grains)
- Sugar (fruit, dairy, desserts, processed foods and soft drinks)
- Fiber (vegetables, beans, fruits, whole grains)

Choosing Carbohydrates

Choosing whole foods (rather than highly processed ones) is a great rule of thumb in general, but especially when it comes to carbohydrates. Whole carbohydrate foods such as starchy vegetables, beans, fruit and whole grains are high in fiber, thus delivering energy, carbohydrates and other important nutrients in the best possible package.

Dietary Fiber

Dietary fiber can be found in carbohydrate-rich foods. Fiber is the part of the food that is not absorbed into the bloodstream and is instead, eliminated. Fiber is beneficial because it:

- Slows the absorption of carbohydrates or sugars into the bloodstream, lessening a spike in blood sugar
- Tames your appetite and increases feelings of fullness
- Promotes healthy and regular bowel function
- Helps feed the beneficial bacteria in the intestines
- Helps lower cholesterol and keep your heart healthy

Consciously Consuming Carbohydrates

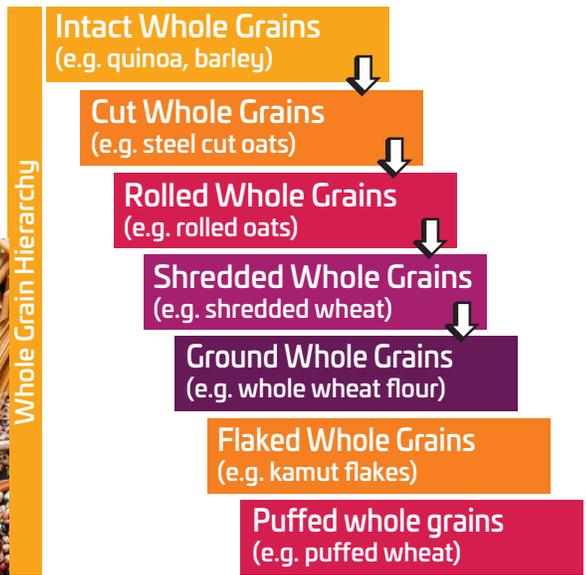
- Choose colorful starchy vegetables such as sweet potatoes, winter squash, peas and carrots
- Eat unlimited non-starchy vegetables like dark leafy greens, broccoli, and cauliflower
- Select intact whole grains such as barley, quinoa, farro or steel cut/whole oats
- Look for 100% whole wheat bread and flour products
- Eat more beans and legumes
- Try whole grain or legume pasta
- Pair fruit with protein and fat (such as an apple with cheese or a pear with nuts,) and eat the skin!

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What is a Whole Grain?

Think of processing of grains almost like a form of pre-digestion – when a grain is processed, it is stripped of its nutrient rich outer layers and fiber, reduced to a more easily digested form. A more quickly digested starch can then lead to a more rapid spike in blood glucose.

A whole grain contains the bran (outer layer,) endosperm (middle layer) and germ (inner layer.) Each later provides nutrients and fiber. Refining a grain removes the bran and germ, and 25% of the protein, important vitamins and minerals, fiber and healthy fats.



Diet Pattern

Research shows that plant-based diets high in fiber (like the Mediterranean diet) have a beneficial effect on glucose, whereas diets that are high in meat are associated with an increased risk of type 2 diabetes. Do your best to use the plate method and load up on whole plant foods. The image below provides a great example of what a healthy plate looks like and as you can see - carbohydrates are emphasized, not excluded!



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