

## Counting carbohydrates

### Nutrients and Carbohydrates

Many foods contain carbohydrates (carbs), including:

- Fruit and fruit juice
- Cereal, bread, pasta, and rice
- Milk and milk products, soy milk
- Beans, legumes, and lentils
- Starchy vegetables like potatoes and corn
- Sweets like cookies, candy, cake, jam and jelly, honey, and other foods that contain added sugar
- Snack foods like chips and crackers

Complex carbohydrates provide vitamins, minerals, and fiber



Foods such as breads, legumes, rice, pasta, and starchy vegetables contain complex carbohydrates

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Your body quickly turns carbohydrates into a sugar called glucose, which is your body's main source of energy.. This raises your blood sugar, or blood glucose level.

Most foods that contain carbohydrates are nutritious and are an important part of a healthy diet. For diabetes, the goal is not to limit carbohydrates in the diet completely, but to make sure that you are not eating too many. Eating a regular amount of carbohydrates throughout the day can help keep your blood sugar level steady.

People with diabetes can better control their blood sugar if they count how many carbohydrates they eat. People with diabetes who take insulin can use carb counting to help them determine the exact dose of insulin they need at meals.

Your dietitian or diabetes educator will teach you a technique called "carb counting."

### Types of Carbohydrates

Your body turns all carbohydrates into energy. There are 3 major types of carbohydrates:

- Sugars
- Starches
- Fiber

Sugars are found naturally in some foods and added to others. Sugar occurs naturally in these nutrient-rich foods:

- Fruits

- Candy
- Cookies, cakes, and pastries
- Regular (non-diet) carbonated beverages, such as soda
- Heavy syrups, such as those added to canned fruit

Starches are found naturally in foods, as well. Your body breaks them down into sugar after you eat them. The following foods have a lot of starch. Many also have fiber. Fiber is the part of food that is not broken down by the body. It slows digestion and helps you feel fuller. Foods containing starch and fiber include:

- Bread
- Cereal
- Legumes, such as beans and chickpeas
- Pasta
- Rice
- Starchy vegetables, such as potatoes

## Counting Your Carbs

Some foods, such as jelly beans, contain only carbohydrates. Other foods, such as animal proteins (all kinds of meat, fish, and eggs), have no carbohydrates.

Most foods, even vegetables, have some carbohydrates. But most green, non-starchy vegetables are very low in carbohydrates.

Most adults with diabetes should eat no more than 200 carbohydrate grams per day. The daily recommended amount for adults is 135 grams per day, but each person should have their own carbohydrate goal. Pregnant women need at least 175 grams of carbohydrates each day.

Packaged foods have labels that tell you how many carbohydrates a food has. They are measured in grams. You can use food labels to count the carbohydrates that you eat. When you are carb counting, a serving equals an amount of food that contains 15 grams of carbohydrate. The serving size listed on a package is not always the same as 1 serving in carbohydrate counting. For example, if a single-serving package of food contains 30 grams of carbohydrate, the package actually contains 2 servings when you are carb counting.

The food label will say what 1 serving size is and how many servings are in the package. If a bag of chips says that it contains 2 servings and you eat the entire bag, then you will need to multiply the label information by 2. For example, let's say the label on a bag of chips states that it contains 2 servings, and 1 serving of chips provides 11 grams of carbohydrate. If you eat the entire bag of chips, you have eaten 22 grams of carbohydrates.

Sometimes the label will list sugar, starch, and fiber separately. The carbohydrate count for a food is the total of these. Use only this total number to count your carbs.

When you count carbs in foods that you cook, you will have to measure the portion of food after cooking it. For example, cooked long grain rice has 15 grams of carbohydrate per 1/3 cup. If you eat a cup of cooked long grain rice, you will be eating 45 grams of carbohydrates, or 3 carbohydrate servings.

Here are some examples of foods and servings sizes that have approximately 15 grams of carbohydrate:

- Half cup (107 grams) of canned fruit (without the juice or syrup)

- Half cup (121 grams) of cooked oatmeal
- One-third cup of cooked pasta (44 grams) (can vary with the shape)
- One-third cup (67 grams) of cooked long grain rice
- One-fourth cup (51 grams) of cooked short grain rice
- Half cup (88 grams) cooked beans, peas, or corn
- One slice of bread
- Three cups (33 grams) popcorn (popped)
- One cup (240 milliliters) milk or soy milk
- Three ounces (84 grams) of baked potato

## Adding up Your Carbohydrates

The total amount of carbohydrates you eat in a day is the sum of the carbohydrates in everything you eat.

When you are learning how to count carbs, use a log book, a sheet of paper, or an app to help you track them. As time passes, it will get easier to estimate your carbohydrates.

Plan to see a dietitian every 6 months. This will help you refresh your knowledge of carb counting. A dietitian can help you determine the right amount of carbohydrate servings to eat each day, based on your personal caloric needs and other factors. The dietitian can also recommend how to distribute your daily carbohydrate intake evenly among your meals and snacks.

## Alternative Names

Carb counting; Carbohydrate-controlled diet; Diabetic diet; Diabetes-counting carbohydrate

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