



CARBOHYDRATES AND FIBER

What Do Carbohydrates Do?

Carbohydrates, or carbs, are 1 of the 3 main building blocks of food, along with protein and fat. Foods with carbs help fuel your body (like gas fuels a car). Healthy adults should get between 45% and 65% of their total daily calories from carbs.

DO CARBOHYDRATES MAKE PEOPLE GAIN WEIGHT?

Contrary to the claims of some popular diets, foods with carbs do not cause obesity. People gain weight if they eat more calories (from all kinds of food) than their bodies burn.

Therefore, a diet that “cuts carbs” without reducing total calories won’t help you lose weight. Also, a low-carb diet may not provide you with enough vitamins, minerals, and dietary fiber for good health.

Which Foods Have Carbohydrates?

Foods with carbs include many healthy choices:

- ▶ Whole grains (such as brown rice, oats, and bulgur) and foods made from whole grains (such as some breads, cereals, and pasta)
- ▶ Vegetables
- ▶ Milk and yogurt
- ▶ Fruits and 100% fruit juices
- ▶ Beans and foods made from beans (such as soy milk)

In addition to energy, healthier carb choices can provide dietary fiber, protein, vitamins, and minerals that your body needs. **Choose a variety of these foods every day!**

Other foods with carbs include:

- ▶ sugar, syrup, and honey
- ▶ foods made with added sugar or other sweeteners (like candy, soft drinks, cakes, cookies, and other snack foods)
- ▶ foods made with refined grains (like white flour or white rice)



These foods provide calories but often lack dietary fiber and other nutrients. For this reason, choose these foods less often. Refined grains may be enriched, meaning certain vitamins and minerals are added back after processing.

HOW MUCH FIBER DO YOU NEED?

Daily recommendations for most healthy adults:

- ▶ **Men 50 years and younger:**
38 grams of fiber per day
 - ▶ **Men 51 years and older:**
30 grams of fiber per day
 - ▶ **Women 50 years and younger:**
25 grams of fiber per day
 - ▶ **Women 51 years and older:**
21 grams of fiber per day
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TIPS FOR GETTING MORE FIBER

- ▶ Start slowly. Adding too much fiber too fast can cause gas, cramps, and diarrhea. Add 1 high-fiber food, adjust to it, and then add another.
 - ▶ Drink plenty of water. This keeps fiber moving through your digestive tract.
 - ▶ Eat the peels. The edible skins of many fruits and vegetables like apples and potatoes contain fiber. Remember to wash skins before eating.
 - ▶ Get your fiber from a variety of foods. This helps you get all the nutrients you need each day. A doctor or dietitian can help you decide whether fiber supplements are a good idea for you.
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What Does Fiber Do?

Fiber contributes to good health in many ways:

- ▶ It keeps food moving smoothly and regularly through your body.
- ▶ It may help prevent heart disease by lowering blood cholesterol levels.
- ▶ It may lower the risk of developing certain cancers.
- ▶ It helps to control blood glucose levels in diabetes.
- ▶ A high-fiber diet tends to make you feel fuller sooner so that you eat less. This can help with weight control.

Tips for Choosing Healthy Carbohydrates

- ▶ Eat a rainbow of different colored fruits and vegetables, including 100% juice.
- ▶ Eat beans and peas often. Try flavoring them with herbs, spices, onions, garlic, and vegetables instead of salty or fatty meats.
- ▶ Make lower-fat milk and dairy choices, like fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1%) milk instead of whole or reduced-fat (2%) milk. Eat fat-free or low-fat yogurt.
- ▶ For at least $\frac{1}{2}$ of the grain foods you eat, choose **whole** grains. (Whole grains contain the entire grain seed of a plant and provide dietary fiber, vitamins, and minerals.)
 - ▶ When choosing bread, read the ingredients list on the food label. The first word should be *whole*. Read the Nutrition Facts label and choose breads that have at least 3 grams of dietary fiber per serving.
 - ▶ When baking, replace $\frac{1}{2}$ of the white flour in recipes with whole-wheat flour.
 - ▶ Choose brown rice instead of white rice, or try other cooked whole grains, such as whole-grain barley, bulgur, quinoa, or farro.
 - ▶ Have whole-wheat pasta instead of pasta made with refined flour.
 - ▶ Snack on air-popped popcorn, whole-grain cereal, or whole-grain tortilla chips.