

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates (kar-bo-hi-draytz) are a major source of energy for the body. Chances are you've heard someone say that they "need to cut down on their carb intake" or they are on a "low carb diet".

Carbohydrates are converted into glucose, the form of sugar that is transported and used by the body more readily than proteins or fats. A diet too high in carbohydrates can upset the delicate balance of your body's blood sugar level, resulting in fluctuations in energy and mood, which leave you feeling irritated and tired.

There are two types of carbohydrates: complex and simple. Intake should be balanced with protein, a little fat and fiber. Complex carbohydrates are often referred to as starchy foods and are naturally in foods as well as being refined in processed foods.

Tips to Controlling Carb intake:

- ✓ Balance your carbohydrate with your protein intake
- ✓ Balance your intake of complex and simple carbohydrates
- ✓ Choose high fiber and whole grain foods more often
- ✓ Cut down on your consumption of white flour, pastas and rice

Examples of **complex carbohydrates in the natural form**: bananas, beans, lentils, nuts, potatoes, corn, wholegrain cereals, wholegrain breads, wholegrain flours and pastas

Examples of **complex carbohydrates as refined starches**: biscuits, cakes, pastries, pizza, sugary processed cereals, white breads, white flour and white rice. Simple carbohydrates also known as sugars exist in natural form in foods such as fruits and vegetables.

Examples of **refined sugars in the refined form**: biscuits, cakes, honey, jams and jellies, pizza, prepared foods and sauces, sweets and snack bars.

How it all works

The body's glucose (sugar) metabolism is a cycle of glucose, insulin and glucagon reactions. All carbohydrates form glucose when digested, which is transported around the body via blood and taken into energy. The pancreas gland in our abdomen secretes the hormone insulin, which controls the uptake of glucose by our cells. If you take in (generate) more glucose than the body requires, it is converted into glycogen, which is stored in the liver or fat around the body. A second hormone called glucagon is secreted by the pancreas when your body needs more energy. This converts the glycogen back into glucose, which is then released into your bloodstream for your cells to use.

What it all means

The slower the release of glucose and hormones, the more stable and sustainable the energy levels of the body. They more refined the carbohydrate; the faster the glucose is released into the bloodstream. This can cause peaks and drops in your blood sugar level and less stable energy levels in the body. Complex carbohydrates provide a slower and more sustained release of energy than simple carbohydrates. In their natural form they contribute to long-term good health, appetite control and sustained energy levels. Eating too much will lead to weight gain, regardless of what foods you get your energy from. While "low carb diets" have had much publicity, gram for gram carbohydrates contain less calories than fat and protein.

The types of carbohydrates you choose to consume make a difference to your wellbeing. Sugar and starch are found in both healthy and "unhealthy foods. Starchy foods such as whole grains are rich in fiber, essential for digestive health and help to control appetite.

Resources

mayoclinic.org
kidshealth.org

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Fun Food Facts!



The Margherita pizza is named for Margherita of Savoy, Queen consort of Italy for 1878 to 1900 during the reign of her husband King Umberto I.

Did You Know?



Yams and Sweet Potatoes are not the same thing

Many of the nutrients in a potato are located just below the skin

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