

Ask A Dietitian - Should I follow a low carbohydrate diet?

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Many of my patients either try a low carbohydrate diet or are wondering if they should start one. We hear from friends, family or in the media that low carbohydrate diets will help with blood sugar control for those who have diabetes or weight loss.

What are carbohydrates and where are they found?

Carbohydrates are broken down into glucose which our cells use for energy. Typically we think of carbohydrates as breads, pasta or rice. Carbohydrates are found in all grains and starches. There are also found in dairy products such as milk and yogurt, fruit, and starchy vegetables such as potatoes and corn. Processed foods such as sugary beverages and dessert foods contain carbohydrate as well.



Do I need carbohydrates?

Yes. This is our body's main source of energy. The Canadian Diabetes Association recommends having a minimum of 130 grams of carbohydrates per day to provide enough glucose (sugar) to the brain. Carbohydrate rich foods such as grains, fruit and dairy products are an important source of nutrients such as iron, calcium, vitamin C, folic acid, potassium and magnesium. Avoiding carbohydrates may put you at risk for nutrient deficiencies. Lastly, carbohydrate rich foods are a great way to get more fibre into your diet which can help with lowering cholesterol, regular bowel movements and blood sugar control.



Will reducing the carbohydrates I eat help me lose weight or control my blood sugars?

Research shows that low carbohydrate diets are no more effective at weight loss than high carbohydrate diets. Also, many people find it difficult to stick with low carbohydrate diets because they are limited in their food choices and do not enjoy what they are eating. The best way to lose or maintain weight is to choose a dietary pattern and physical activity routine that you enjoy and can keep up with.

For better control of blood sugars, the type of carbohydrate matters. Choose high fibre, less processed carbohydrates more often such as whole grains, breads and cereals. Choose low fibre, processed carbohydrates such as white bread, sugary cereals and dessert foods less often. [Click here to check out the Glycemic](#)



[Index for more information on how you can help control your blood sugars with your food choices.](#)

How can I incorporate healthy carbohydrate rich foods into my day?

- Enjoy a piece of fruit for a snack or dessert or toss berries on your yogurt or cereal
- [Try a grain based salad recipe as a side dish or meatless meal. Click here for a Black Bean Couscous salad recipe.](#)
- [Make a milk or milk alternative based smoothie for breakfast. Click here for a Banana Nut Smoothie recipe.](#)
- [For a healthier option for dessert, try this Baked Cinnamon Pears with Oat Topping recipe](#)



Figure 1: Picture from Eat Right Ontario

References:

Dietitians of Canada. (2013). Should I try a low carbohydrate diet to lose weight? Retrieved from: <http://www.dietitians.ca/getattachment/6a731c8e-6e06-4ba4-b369-660c8c3ebcb6/FACTSHEET-Should-I-try-a-low-carbohydrate-diet-to-lose-weight.pdf.aspx>