



# Diabetes and Nutrition: Carbohydrates

## How are diabetes and nutrition linked?

Diabetes is a disease characterized by higher than normal levels of glucose (sugar) in the bloodstream. Glucose is produced by the body from the foods you eat, mainly carbohydrates. So your food choices have an impact on your glucose levels.

The major nutrients in food are protein, fat, and carbohydrates. You need all of these nutrients in your diet. Among the many different sources of these nutrients, some are better for you than others. For example, lean white meat (such as chicken breast with no skin) is a healthier source of protein than fatty red meat (such as hamburger). Liquid vegetable oils (such as olive and canola) are more heart-healthy than solid fats (such as margarine and butter). There are also differences among carbohydrates, and these differences are important in diabetes control.

## What are carbohydrates?

Carbohydrates (carbs) are the sugars, starches, and fiber in your diet. Starch is in breads, pasta, cereals, potatoes, beans, peas, and lentils. Natural sugars are in fruits, milk, and vegetables. Added sugars are in desserts, sweetened beverages, and candy. Fiber is in all plant foods—vegetables, fruits, and beans.

Unlike refined grains like white flour, whole grains contain more fiber, vitamins and minerals. Brown rice, wild rice, oats, corn, barley, whole wheat breads, whole wheat pasta, millet, quinoa are some examples of whole grains.

## How much and what types of carbs should you eat?

The amount of carbs you should eat depends on your gender, size, age,

activity level, and medications. A carbohydrate choice is 15g of carbohydrate per serving. Most adult women require at least 3–4 carbohydrate choices (45–60g) at each meal (breakfast, lunch, dinner), while adult males require about 4–5 carbohydrate choices (60–75g) at each meal.

While the amount of carbohydrate is important, so is the quality. Whole grains, beans, vegetables, and fruits are best.

## Recommended Levels of Blood Glucose—Levels Before and After Meals

Before a meal (preprandial)	70–130 mg/dl (5.0–7.2 mmol/l)
After a meal (postprandial)	Less than 180 mg/dl (Less than 10.0 mmol/l)

## What should you do with this information?

To start, ask your doctor or a registered dietitian or certified diabetes educator to help you plan the amount of carbohydrates to include in your meals and snacks.

Read food labels for carbohydrate content. Check the serving size and look at the amount of total carbohydrate. Determine how many servings you are going to eat and calculate the amount of carbohydrate. For example, if the label indicates that one slice of bread has 15 grams of carbohydrates and you choose to eat two slices, then your total carbohydrate intake will be 30 grams or 2 carbohydrate choices.

People with diabetes need to pay particular attention to their carbohydrate intake but it's important to know that a healthy diet can include the occasional treat every now and then, which can be substituted for other carbohydrate choices.

## Resources

- Find-an-Endocrinologist: [www.hormone.org](http://www.hormone.org) or call 1-800-HORMONE (800-467-6663)
- American Association of Diabetes Educators: [www.diabeteseducator.org](http://www.diabeteseducator.org)
- American Dietetic Association: [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)
- National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse (NIH): <http://diabetes.niddk.nih.gov/about/index.htm>

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