

carbohydrates

Carbohydrates are a large group of sugars, starches, celluloses, and gums that contain carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen in similar proportions.

Their main function is to provide fuel and energy for the body, especially the brain and central nervous system. The body breaks down these starches and sugars into glucose which the body uses as fuel.

Despite the myth perpetuated by many fad diets, carbohydrates are an important part of a healthful diet. The Acceptable Macronutrient Distribution Range (AMDR) for carbohydrates is 45 to 65 percent of total calories.

Easily digested (simple) carbohydrates from white bread, white rice, pastries, sugared sodas, and other highly processed foods are thought to contribute to weight gain and interfere with weight loss due to their quicker digestion and inability to sustain a sense of fullness. Whole grains, beans, fruits, vegetables, and other sources of intact carbohydrates do just the opposite—they promote good health by giving the body the energy it requires in a manner that provides fullness and satiety.

The key to healthful eating of carbohydrates is to emphasize complex carbohydrates such as foods high in bran, whole grains and fibers, such as whole wheat pasta, brown rice and whole grain breads. Complex carbohydrates are also a good source of vitamins, minerals, and fiber, and these time-release capsules of glucose provide the body the energy it needs to function at its peak levels.

SIMPLE CARBOHYDRATES TO AVOID

- Sugar
- Corn syrup
- Sucrose
- High-fructose corn syrup

COMPLEX CARBOHYDRATES THAT ARE GOOD FOR YOU

- Whole wheat pasta
- Brown rice
- Potatoes
- Whole grain cereals
- Whole grains breads

A FEW TIPS FOR ADDING GOOD CARBOHYDRATES TO YOUR DIET:

- Start the day with whole grains. If you're partial to hot cereals, try old-fashioned or steel-cut oats. If you're a cold cereal person, look for one that lists whole wheat, whole oats, or other whole grains first on the ingredient list.
- Use whole grain breads for lunch or snacks. Check the label to make sure that whole wheat or another whole grain is the first ingredient listed.
- Bag the mash... Instead, try sweet potatoes, brown rice or even "newer" grains like bulgur, wheat berries, millet, or hulled barley with your dinner.
- Pick up some whole wheat pasta. If the whole grain products are too chewy for you, look for those that are made with half whole wheat flour and half white flour.
- Bring on the beans. Beans are an excellent source of slowly digested carbohydrates as well as a great source of protein.

*Harvard School of Public Health 2008
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