

# carbohydrates 101

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## We need carbohydrates!!



**T**he wild popularity of the Atkins, South Beach, and other low-carbohydrate fad diets led many Americans to believe that carbohydrates are "bad". The truth is that some types of carbs promote health while others increase the risk for diabetes and coronary heart disease. The keys are to: 1) choose the right types of carbohydrates and, 2) to eat enough, but not too much.

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**Carbohydrates** (also called: Carbs), are one of three basic macronutrients needed to sustain life (the other two are proteins and fats). Sugars, starches, and fiber are all types of carbohydrates. Carbs are the main energy source for the body and the only direct energy source for the brain. They are found in a wide range of foods that bring a variety of other important nutrients to the diet, such as vitamins and minerals, phytochemicals, antioxidants, and dietary fiber. Fruits, vegetables, grain foods, and dairy products naturally contain carbohydrates in varying amounts. Carbs are also found in ingredients in many other foods prepared at home, eaten at a restaurant, or purchased at grocery stores.

**Not all carbohydrates are the same.** The processing of carbohydrate-rich foods strips many or all of the nutrients and fiber away leaving "refined" carbohydrates that are quickly digested and low in nutrients. Table sugar, white bread, white rice, pastries, chips, sodas, candy bars, and other highly processed foods, when consumed in excess, contribute to weight gain and health problems.

"Unprocessed" carbs do just the opposite—they promote good health and provide vitamins, minerals and fiber. These are the carbs that are found intact as they naturally occur in the food or ingredient, like fruits, vegetables, beans, and whole grains. Not only will these foods help protect against a range of chronic diseases, they can also help you lose weight when chosen over processed carbohydrates.

**How much do we need?** Children and adults need a minimum of 130 grams of carbs per day for proper brain function. It is recommend that adults obtain 50 to 60 percent of their total daily calories from carbohydrates. That amounts to about 6 servings for women and 8 servings for men.

**The bottom line:** As the main energy source for the body, carbohydrates are an important part of a healthful diet. They can be enjoyed **in moderation** as part of a balanced diet and healthy lifestyle. Remember that carbohydrates are a source of energy or calories. If you consume more calories than you expend by metabolism and exercise you will gain weight no matter what the source of those calories. So choose carbohydrates wisely. Moderate your intake of "refined" carbs choosing plenty of nutrient-rich foods like fruits, vegetables, grains, and dairy products, while not exceeding calorie needs.

***For more information about carbohydrates see other documents and information available on our website.***