



# Carbohydrates and Healthy Eating

Carbohydrates (“carbs”) are a very important part of a healthy diet. They are the body's main source of fuel, and carbohydrate-containing foods provide vitamins and minerals. Foods that contain carbs have the biggest effect on blood sugar readings after meals. To help control blood sugars, it is important to know how many carbs are in foods. It might seem like a good idea to avoid carbs if you want to control blood sugar, but it is not the healthy choice. The American Diabetes Association recommends a balanced diet including protein, fat, and carbohydrates.

Sugar is a type of carb that occurs naturally in foods like:

- ❖ Fruits
- ❖ Milk
- ❖ Sweets and desserts

Starchy foods are also carbs. They turn into sugar very quickly after they are eaten. These include:

- ❖ Foods made with grain (bread, rice, tortillas, cereal, pasta)
- ❖ Starchy vegetables (potatoes, corn, peas)
- ❖ Dried beans

For a long time, experts thought that people with diabetes should not eat foods made with sugar. Now we know that all carbs affect blood sugar in much the same way. You can now enjoy a moderate amount of “sweets” with your meal.

Fiber is a carbohydrate that is not absorbed and does not raise blood sugar. In fact, fiber slows down the absorption of sugars. When you eat a piece of fruit instead of drinking juice, or have whole wheat instead of white bread, your blood sugar does not go up as quickly.

Here are some tips on healthy eating with diabetes:

1. Try to follow a consistent meal plan and schedule. Eating a balanced diet with a variety of foods (fruits, vegetables, dairy products, whole grains, lean meats and poultry, fish, nuts, seeds and beans) will help keep your blood sugar even through the day.
2. The best kind of fat is unsaturated (usually liquid or vegetable). This is healthier than saturated (animal-source, solid) fats or trans fats (often found in hydrogenated oils). Try to avoid saturated or trans fats.
3. Use sugar in moderation. Consider lower sugar options when available.
4. Read food labels carefully.
5. Get your fiber: the American Dietetic Association recommends that all adults eat 20-35 grams of fiber every day.
6. Drink plenty of water.
7. Use less salt.
8. Get active. Research shows that eating a healthy diet and being active most days can help the body use its insulin better. It can reduce the risk of getting diabetes and help control blood sugar in those who already have it. Being active has also been shown to reduce stress, improve mood and boost “brain power.”

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