

Carbohydrates

in a healthy diet

FACT SHEET

You can have your carbs and eat them too... you just need to know which ones to choose.

What you need to know

Health, vitality and energy come from eating a varied, nutritious diet and getting regular exercise. The secret to looking good, feeling great and enjoying life is to eat well – and that includes healthy carbs!

Carbohydrates are in almost everything we eat. They come in many sizes, shapes and forms. Breads, breakfast cereals, rice, pasta, noodles and crispbreads are all familiar carbohydrate-rich foods. Dairy products (like milk and yoghurt), legumes (like chickpeas and baked beans), fruit, starchy vegetables (such as potatoes), confectionery, chips, cakes, pastries, soft drinks, honey and sugar are also 'carbohydrate' containing foods. Did you know an apple and 1 slice of bread contain around the same amount of carbs?

The umbrella term 'carbohydrates' is large and includes many different foods. 'Good-for-you' grain-based carbs like bread, breakfast cereals, rice, pasta and noodles, plus legumes, contain many essential vitamins and minerals. Grains, especially wholegrains, are packed with B vitamins, Vitamin E, iron, zinc, selenium, magnesium, phosphorus antioxidants and fibre – all important for your body to function at its best. Not only are they good for you, grains and legumes are a versatile, economical way to feed the whole family and they are tasty too.

One of the most popular diet myths of recent times is that carbs are 'fattening'. The truth is that most 'everyday' nutritious grain-based carbs like bread, breakfast cereals, rice and pasta are not fattening, but what you eat with them can be. It's best to avoid high fat, high sugar sauces, spreads and toppings and choose wholegrains where possible.

Carbs that are 'not-so-good-for-you' like confectionery, chips, cakes, pastries, soft drinks and many take-away foods provide excess fat, sugar and kilojoules and will be 'fattening' if eaten too often. Many people desperate to lose weight fall into the trap of cutting out healthy carbs, only to find they get extra hungry and surrender to their cravings for less healthy carbs.

Carbohydrates and Weight Loss

Carbohydrates are probably the most misunderstood of all nutrients. Many fad diets claim restricting carbs, especially at specific times of day or night, will help you to lose weight (e.g. no carbs after 5pm). Cutting out healthy 'everyday' carbs like breads, breakfast cereals, rice and pasta is not the best long-term weight loss strategy. Whilst it may seem like you are losing weight in the short term due to the 'low carbs', any weight you lose is most likely fluid loss - not fat loss. If you achieve longer term weight loss, this is more likely to be a result of eating fewer kilojoules in general – not just the carbs per sé!

The best way to lose weight and maintain your weight loss (the hardest part), is by eating less and exercising more. Enjoy a healthy balanced diet containing nutritious carbohydrates from wholegrains, legumes, fresh fruit, vegetables and low fat dairy, teamed with lean meat, fish and eggs. Keep watch on your portion sizes, as there is truth in the saying "too much of a good thing" - overeating any food can result in weight gain.

Did you know:



An apple and 1 slice of bread contain around the same amount of carbs?



Everyday carbs like bread, breakfast cereals, rice and pasta are not fattening, but what you eat with them can be!



How much is enough?

Australian Dietary Guidelines¹ recommend a diet containing “plenty of cereals (including breads, rice, pasta and noodles), preferably wholegrain”. The actual amount of grain-based foods required each day varies depending on factors like body size, activity level, age and gender. Based on the Australian ‘Food for Health’² guide, Go Grains Health & Nutrition (Go Grains) has developed a simple message to promote the amount of grain-based foods you should eat each day – it’s ‘4+ serves a day’ (one serve is 2 slices of bread or 2-4 crispbreads, 1 cup of cooked oats, rice, pasta or noodles and around 1 cup of breakfast cereal). Aim to make half of your serves ‘wholegrain’. You can find out more information about ‘4+ serves a day’ on the Go Grains website (www.gograins.com.au).

Why are wholegrains so special?

Wholegrain foods are super foods, so you don’t want to miss out on them. Packed with the goodness of the ‘whole’ grain, they are superior when it comes to ‘carbs’. It is the unique combination of nutrients in the bran, germ and endosperm working together which gives wholegrains the power to help keep you healthy. People who regularly eat wholegrains are less likely to develop type 2 diabetes³, heart disease⁴ and some cancers⁵; they can also find it easier to manage their weight⁶. Go Grains recommends all Australian adults aim for 48g of wholegrains each and every day⁷. For more information on the 48g Daily Target Intake for wholegrains, visit www.gograins.com.au.

Glycaemic Index

The Glycaemic Index (GI) ranks carbohydrate containing foods from 1-100 depending on how fast the carbohydrate in the food is digested by the body. High GI (> 70) foods are digested quickly, medium GI (56-69) foods are digested moderately fast, and low GI foods (<55) are digested slowly. Low GI foods can help keep you fuller for longer, make it easier to manage your blood sugar levels and may be helpful when trying to manage your weight. A healthy diet can include a combination of low, medium and high GI foods. You can find out more about the GI at www.gograins.com.au.

Carb Myth Busters

MYTH

Avoiding carbs at night is the best way to lose weight.

BUSTED

This is a widespread myth often promoted by ‘low carb’ enthusiasts. However, there is no scientific evidence to suggest that avoiding carbs at any time of day or night will help you to lose weight in the long term⁶. Reducing the size of your meals at night can help you to lose weight by simply reducing the amount of kilojoules you eat.

Nutritious carbs like breads, healthy breakfast cereals, rice, pasta and noodles are a very important part of a healthy diet and you should aim for ‘4+ serves a day’, preferably wholegrain. Wholegrain foods which are also typically high in fibre and lower GI can help to keep you feeling fuller for longer and assist with weight loss.

Low carb or high protein diets are more effective weight loss solutions than high carbohydrate diets.

It’s worth noting there are no strict guidelines about what is high and what is low. The media adds to the confusion by using the terms ‘low carb’ and ‘high protein’ without clarification of what they actually mean. Diets that cut out healthy carbs also cut out important sources of low fat protein, fibre and B-group vitamins which are needed for energy metabolism.

There is no sound scientific research to support the idea that a low-carbohydrate or high-protein diet is more effective at helping you to lose weight in the long-term⁸. The best ‘diet’ is one based on eating less and exercising more, and one which you can enjoy and sustain - including a wide range of healthy, nutritious foods to keep you looking and feeling your best!

References:

1. National Health and Medical Research Council. Dietary Guidelines for Australian Adults. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2003.
2. National Health and Medical Research Council. Food for Health. Commonwealth Department of Health & Ageing, 2003.
3. BJ Venn and JI Mann. Cereal grains, legumes and diabetes. *Eur J Clin Nutr* 2004, 58:1443–1461.
4. I Flight and P Clifton. Cereal grains and legumes in the prevention of coronary heart disease and stroke: a review of the literature. *Eur J Clin Nutr* 2006, 60:1145–1159.
5. GH McIntosh. Cereal Foods, Fibres and the Prevention of Cancers. *Nutr Diet* 2001, 58 Suppl2:S35-S48.
6. P Williams et al. Cereal grains, legumes, and weight management: a comprehensive review of the scientific evidence. *Nutr Rev* 2008, 66(4):171–182.
7. T Griffiths. Towards an Australian ‘daily target intake’ for wholegrains. *Food Aust* 2007, 59(12):600–601.
8. National Health and Medical Research Council. Clinical Practice Guidelines for the Management of Overweight and Obesity in Adults 2003, (5.3.5):75–78.



Aim for ‘4+ serves a day’ of grain-based foods such as breads, breakfast cereals, rice, pasta and crispbreads, preferably wholegrain.

For further information:

To learn more about the benefits of grain-based foods and health, or to order additional copies of this fact sheet, visit the Go Grains website at www.gograins.com.au or contact the Go Grains ‘Information Line’ by calling 1300 GRAINS (1300 472 467)