Carbohydrates

What Do Carbohydrates Do?
Carbohydrates are one of the three main building blocks of food, along with protein and fat. Foods with carbohydrate help fuel your body (like gas fuels a car).

Which Foods Have Carbohydrates?
Foods with carbohydrates include many healthy choices:

- Whole grains (like brown rice, oats, and bulgur) and foods made from whole grains (like some breads, cereals, crackers, and pasta)
- Vegetables
- Milk, yogurt, and other dairy foods
- Fruits and 100% fruit juices
- Beans and foods made from beans (such as soymilk or tofu)

In addition to energy from carbohydrates, these foods can give you fiber, protein, vitamins, and minerals that your body needs. **Choose a variety of these foods every day!**

Other foods with carbohydrates include:

- Sugar, syrup, and honey
- Foods made with sugar or other sweeteners (like candy, soft drinks, cakes, cookies, and other snack foods)
- Foods made with processed or refined grains (like white flour or white rice)

These foods provide calories but lack fiber, vitamins, and minerals. For this reason, choose these foods less often.

Tips for Choosing Healthy Carbohydrates

- Eat a rainbow of fruits and vegetables. Different colored fruits and vegetables give you a variety of vitamins and minerals, as well carbohydrates.
- Eat dried beans and peas often. They are rich in fiber and offer protein, vitamins, and minerals. Try flavoring them with herbs, spices, onions, garlic, and vegetables, instead of salty or fatty meats.

Do Carbohydrates Make People Gain Weight?
Contrary to the claims of some popular diets, foods with carbohydrate do not cause obesity. People gain too much weight if they eat more calories (from all kinds of food) than their bodies burn.

Therefore, a diet that “cuts carbs” without reducing total calories won’t help you lose weight. Also, a low-carbohydrate diet may not provide you with enough vitamins, minerals, and fiber for good health.
• For at least half of the grain foods you eat, choose whole grains. (Whole grains contain the entire grain seed of a plant and are rich in fiber, vitamins, and minerals.)
  – When choosing bread, read the ingredient list on the food label. The first word should be “whole.” If it isn’t, the bread contains more processed flour than whole grain flour.
  – When baking, replace half of the white flour in recipes with whole wheat flour.
  – Choose brown rice instead of white rice, or try other cooked grains, like barley, bulgur, quinoa, or farro.
  – Have whole wheat pasta instead of types made with processed flour.
  – Snack on air-popped popcorn, whole grain cereal, or baked corn tortilla chips.
• When choosing beverages, look for labels that say 100% fruit juice. If a fruit-flavored drink does not say 100% fruit juice, it probably doesn’t have much nutritional value.
• Make lower-fat milk and dairy choices:
  – Choose fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1%) milk instead of whole or reduced-fat (2%) milk.
  – Eat nonfat or low-fat yogurt.

How Much Carbohydrate Do You Need?
Adults should get between 45 and 65 percent of their total daily calories from carbohydrates. The chart shows how many grams (g) of carbohydrate this is for different calorie levels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If You Eat . . .</th>
<th>Aim for . . .</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1,200 calories daily</td>
<td>135–195 g carbohydrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,400 calories daily</td>
<td>158–228 g carbohydrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,600 calories daily</td>
<td>180–260 g carbohydrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,800 calories daily</td>
<td>202–292 g carbohydrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,000 calories daily</td>
<td>225–325 g carbohydrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,200 calories daily</td>
<td>248–358 g carbohydrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,400 calories daily</td>
<td>270–390 g carbohydrate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>