

LEARNING ABOUT CARBOHYDRATES



Carbs are the main source of energy for your body. Carbs turn into sugar in our blood stream. There are 3 types of carbs:

- Sugars
- Starches
- Fiber

WHY DO I NEED TO LEARN ABOUT CARBOHYDRATES?

When you have type 1 diabetes your body does not make insulin. So, you must give yourself insulin. The amount of insulin you give yourself depends on your blood sugar level and the food you eat.

Most of the insulin you give goes to helping your body use carbohydrates. A carbohydrate is called a carb for short. Carbs give you energy. They also keep your brain and muscles working. You need insulin and carbs to stay alive and healthy!

The problem with carbs is that people do not eat the same thing every day. One day you may eat rice. The next day you may eat potatoes. One day you may eat more, the next day less. That means you need to give a different amount of insulin before the meal to keep your blood sugar level normal.

ABOUT CARBS

Sugars

Sugars are simple carbs. They come in many forms. And there are over 25 kinds of sugars. Some common names for sugar are table sugar, corn syrup and honey.

Your stomach absorbs sugars very quickly. Then they go into your bloodstream. Even your mouth absorbs sugars. So, if you suck on a piece of candy, the sugar goes straight from your mouth into your bloodstream. That means these simple sugar carbs are great for treating low blood sugar. But if you eat too much, they can also cause high blood sugar levels. Simple carbs can include:

Sugar, Honey & Syrups



Drinks like milk, fruit juice, and regular sodas



MORE ABOUT CARBS

Fiber

Fiber is a form of carbohydrate that does not go into your bloodstream. It comes from plants. Your body cannot digest it. Fiber adds bulk to your diet. It is very important for keeping your intestines healthy.



Starches

Starches are complex carbs. They take longer to digest. They may raise your blood sugar levels for a long time after you eat them.

There are many types of complex carbs. They include green vegetables (veggies), pasta, rice, bread and potatoes.

Complex carbs include all:

- Green veggies
- Starchy veggies such as potatoes, sweet potatoes, corn and pumpkin
- Beans, lentils and peas
- Whole grains and food made from them, such as oatmeal, rice, pasta, and whole-grain breads
- Anything made with flour like:
 - Breads
 - Pastas
 - Tortillas
 - Cereals
 - Cookies



DO CARBS RAISE MY BLOOD SUGAR LEVEL?

In most cases, carbs do raise your blood sugar levels. Simple carbs do it more quickly than complex carbs. So, you use simple carbs to treat low blood sugar levels. Complex carbs may make your blood sugar levels go up slowly over time.

Eating carbs along with protein and fat can slow down how quickly you absorb the carbs. It can cause higher blood sugar levels over a number of hours.



Remember, all fruits and veggies have carbs too, but they have different amounts.



WHAT IS CARB COUNTING?

WHY DOES IT MATTER FOR TYPE 1 DIABETES?

Carb counting means learning how many carbs you eat in a meal or snack. This is so you can give just the right amount of insulin for the carbs you are eating.

If you give the right amount of insulin for the carbs you eat, then your blood sugar levels will not go too high. They should also come back down to normal in a few hours.

If you do not give enough insulin for the carbs you eat, your blood sugar levels will go too high. If you give too much insulin, they can go too low.

Many years ago, we used to tell people with diabetes that they needed to eat the same amount and type of carbs at each meal. We had people take the same amount of insulin with each meal. We had them eat the same amount and the same type of food. This made people with diabetes unhappy because they could not eat freely, like other people. Experts came up with the idea of carb counting and giving different amounts of insulin based on the carbs in the meal to fix this problem.



Carb counting - I am going to have to go to school to learn this stuff!



At first it may be hard. But it gets easier with practice. You do not have to do it alone either.