

## Has **carbs** become a dirty word?

Wherever I go, I hear people talking about staying away from carbs. But let's uncover what is myth and what is real.

What's most important in terms of shedding excess weight and living healthier isn't really about carbs vs protein. It's about good carbs vs bad carbs.

Most of us are familiar with the distinction between healthy and unhealthy carbohydrates. Examples of whole **carbs** include vegetables, whole fruit, legumes, potatoes and whole grains. These foods are generally **healthy**. On the other hand, refined **carbs** include sugar-sweetened beverages, fruit juices, pastries, white bread, white pasta, white rice and others, (See full list of healthy and unhealthy carbs at the bottom of this article).

Eating carbohydrates is an important part of eating healthy, but the real question is what kind of carbs are we consuming?

Loading up on cakes and cookies to get your recommended daily servings, is obviously not optimal.

Carbohydrates are the starchy and sugary parts of food that break down into glucose which the body needs for fuel. It's important not to confuse the carbs in processed grain products with those contained in whole grains. Whole grains are an extremely important source of fiber, a key nutrient many are deficient in. The general fiber recommendation for adults is 25 grams per day, and the average American is currently getting half of that.

### **Simple versus complex carbs**

The three main types of carbohydrates are sugars, starches and fiber. Starches, sugars and fiber are called “simple” or “complex” carbs, based on their chemical makeup and what your body does with them. But since foods often contain a mixture of both, it can become confusing.

The difference between a simple and complex carb is in how quickly it is digested and absorbed as well as its chemical structure.

**Simple carbohydrates** are the quickest source of energy, as they are very rapidly digested.

The major simple carbohydrates or **sugars** are: **glucose, maltose, fructose and sucrose** which come from plants.

**Some examples of simple carbohydrate foods are:** Fruits, such as bananas, mangoes and raisins, 100 percent fruit juice and honey are all high in simple carbohydrates. Lactose is also classified as a simple carbohydrate, therefore milk and yogurt are also sources of simple carbs.

**Some examples of complex carbohydrate foods are whole grains such as:** Buckwheat, brown rice, corn, wheat, barley, oats, sorghum and quinoa.

### **Real food versus fake carbs**

Some carbs truly are bad. And some carbs are tremendously good for you. How do you know the difference?

To make this as simple as possible, the rule of thumb is to eat foods that look as if they actually came out of the earth. Eat whole corn kernels, for example, instead of corn flakes, eat an orange instead of orange “vitamin water,” or orange juice. Eat protein plant foods rather than vegan protein powder. Choose brown rice instead of white rice.

**The less processed and refined a carb is, the healthier** it is – and the better it is for your waistline.

By fake, I am talking about food that is more a product of factories than of the soil.

**Fake carbs are foods that have been so overly processed** – fiber stripped, nutrients stripped, water squeezed out, fat added, salt added, sugar added, calories added – that they are something “our great-great grandmothers would not have recognized as food,” writes Michael Pollan in his excellent book *In Defense of Food*.

Some “fake”/refined carb sources are:

- Refined grains such as white bread,
- pizza crust
- pretzels
- hamburger buns
- mega-muffins
- Chips
  - All desserts except whole fruit

- Ice cream, sherbet, frozen yogurt, etc.
- Most breads
- Many crackers (100% stone-ground whole grain crackers are less refined)
- Cookies
- Cakes
- Muffins
- Pancakes
- Waffles
- Pies
- Pastries
- Candy
- Chocolate (dark, milk and white). Baker's chocolate is unsweetened and is therefore an exception.
- Breaded or battered foods
- All types of dough (phyllo, pie crust, etc.)
- Most cereals except for unsweetened, 100% whole grain cereals in which you can see the whole grains in their entirety with the naked eye (unsweetened muesli, rolled oats, or unsweetened puffed grain cereals are good examples)
- Most pastas, noodles and couscous
- Jello® (sugar-free varieties exist but it's much healthier to make your own with unsweetened gelatin and fresh fruit)
- Jellies, jams and preserves

- Bagels
- Pretzels
- Pizza (because of the flour in the dough)
- Puddings and custards
- Corn chips
- Caramel corn and kettle corn
- Most granola bars, power bars, energy bars, etc. (unless labelled sugar-free).
- Rice wrappers
- Tortillas (unless 100% stone-ground whole grain)
- Most rice cakes and corn cakes (unless labelled 100% whole grain)
- Panko crumbs
- Croutons
- Fried vegetable snacks like green beans and carrot chips (usually contain added dextrin, a sweet starch)
- Ketchup
- Honey mustard
- Most barbecue sauces
- Check labels on salsa, tomato sauces, salad dressings and other jarred/canned sauces for sugar/sweeteners
- Sweetened yogurts and other sweetened dairy products
- Honey-roasted nuts
- Sweetened sodas

- Chocolate milk (and other sweetened milks)
- Condensed milk
- Hot cocoa
- Most milk substitutes (almond milk, soy milk, oat milk, etc.) because they usually have sugar added—read label first
- Sweet wines and liqueurs

According to researchers at Yale University, bad carbohydrates such as sweets and biscuits cause falls in blood sugar, affecting the part of the brain that controls impulse. This leads to a loss of self-control and a desire for unhealthy, high-calorie foods. A diet high in calories contributes to weight gain, which increases the risk for developing Type 2 diabetes.

**Whole food/good carbohydrate sources are products such as:**

- brown rice
- whole-grain pasta
- beans
- whole wheat bread
- whole oats
- buckwheat
- millet
- whole rye
- whole-grain barley
- whole-grain corn
- bananas
- broccoli

- leafy greens
- figs
- apples
- pears
- carrots
- sweet potatoes
- berries
- squash
- artichokes
- cucumber
- peppers
- tomatoes
- oranges
- asparagus
- mushrooms
- green beans
- Fresh or frozen unsweetened fruits
- All vegetables
- Whole grains (whole grain rice, oats, barley, quinoa, corn, etc.)
- Nuts and seeds of all types
- Unsweetened nut butters
- Unsweetened coconut
- Popcorn
- 100% wholegrain rice cakes
- Whole legumes (beans, peas, lentils)

- Guacamole
- Unsweetened salsa
- Vegetable tapenades
- Olives
- Unsweetened pickles
- Soy products (like tofu and unsweetened or sugar-free soy milk)
- 100% stone-ground wholegrain breads or crackers without sugar added
- Unsweetened tomato sauce and other unsweetened, starch-free sauces
- Unsweetened salad dressings (most fat-free dressings contain sugar—check labels).
- Herbs and spices
- Oils
- Unsweetened vinegars (balsamic vinegar and certain other fruity vinegars can be very sweet—read label for carbohydrate content)
- Textured vegetable protein
- Seitan
- Tempeh
- Unsweetened coffee, tea, sparkling water (either plain or with natural flavors or essences added), water



These foods are rich in fiber, vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients beneficial to your health. Also, they have a low glycemic index because they cause a slower change in blood sugar levels. Diets rich in high glycemic index foods cause a rapid rise in blood glucose levels, thereby increasing the risk for diabetes and heart disease. By contrast, foods with a low glycemic index help you achieve a more stable blood sugar and improve weight loss and control Type 2 diabetes.

**Stay away from carbs that are:**

- High in calorie density. (Just a few bites of a corn dog or energy bar, and you've taken in a bunch of calories.)
- High in refined sugars (whether white sugar, corn syrup, or so-called "natural" sugars like honey and added fruit juices).
- High in refined grains like white flour.
- Low in many nutrients.
- Low in fiber.



- High in sodium (over 2000mg/day).
- Sometimes high in saturated fat.
- Sometimes high in cholesterol and Trans fats.

**Increase carbs that are:**

- Low to moderate in calorie density, which means we can eat filling amounts and satisfy our hunger, but not worry about going overboard on calories.
- High in an enormous variety of nutrients.
- Devoid of refined sugars and refined grains. In America, refined sugars like corn syrup now make up more than 20% of the calories we eat each day. That's a big problem because our human bodies evolved over centuries and centuries to metabolize *unrefined* carbohydrates. We're equipped to handle corn. We're clueless about high fructose corn syrup. Daily tsunamis of sugar in our bloodstream are directly linked to our current epidemics of obesity and type 2 diabetes.
- High in naturally occurring fiber, which helps lower not only blood sugar and insulin levels but also LDL bad cholesterol. Fiber-rich foods also help you fill up on fewer calories so that you can lose weight more easily. A high-fiber diet also helps prevent constipation, hemorrhoids, and certain cancers. Americans average just 12 to 15 grams of fiber a day. Nutrition experts say we ought to be getting *at least* 35 to 50 fiber grams daily.
- Low in sodium.
- Low in saturated fat.
- Very low (often zero) cholesterol, and no Trans fats.

**Potato, yes!**

Potatoes are a staple in many diets around the world. These cool-season vegetables are part of the starchy vegetable group and offer a variety of nutrients. Potatoes have a bad reputation because of how they are prepared, topped and cooked, but as a side dish or a stand-alone meal with healthy toppings, potatoes can make a nutritious meal choice. The potato's fiber, potassium, **vitamin C**, and vitamin B6 content, coupled with its lack of cholesterol, all support heart health. Potatoes contain significant amounts of fiber. Fiber helps lower the total amount of cholesterol in the blood, thereby decreasing the risk of heart disease. Most people are using diets high in fat and protein but low in antioxidants and complex carbohydrates, a stacked deck that can only promote disease.

### **Plants, plants, plants!**

Animal products are in general very high in fat, so once it is combined with some “fake” carbs, the caloric intake is tipped way over in the red.

**Saturated** fats raise **cholesterol** levels. These fats are found predominately in animal products, such as all types of **meat**, eggs and **dairy products**, so it's important to avoid these items. **Saturated** fats are also found in a few vegetable oils, such as palm oil, coconut oil, hydrogenated oils and chocolate.

Another commonly misinterpreted fact is this: ***Diabetes is not caused by sugar intake, but actually by fat intake.***

The simplest message is to focus on foods that look like it grew out of the soil. Eat as many whole foods as possible. Maintain plenty of variety in form of lentils, beans, whole grains, fruits and vegetables, remove all the “extras on top” and voila! Watch the body fat melt away, plaque disappear and the energy increase.