

Carbs - What I Need to Know

When it comes to carbohydrate, the most important thing to consider is the **AMOUNT you eat**. Carbohydrate is the only nutrient that directly increases blood glucose and insulin levels, so how much of it you have can have a big impact on your health.

The only thing we use carbs for in the body is energy, though carb-containing foods sometimes contain fibre or other vitamins and minerals that can be health promoting.

Most people think we **NEED** to eat carbs, but this is not true. Although the brain does use some glucose, if we don't eat any carbs our body can make its own.

We should only have 5 to 7 grams of glucose in our blood at any one time. This is about 1 to 2 teaspoons. Our body can easily meet this need without us eating any carbohydrate.

We can get all the fibre and any other vitamins and minerals we need from other food sources too.

So, if reducing your carb intake helps you to achieve your health goals there is no reason to avoid doing this. In fact, this has been shown to be a safe and effective way to improve diabetes management for many people.

It is important to remember that foods which belong in other food groups can still include carbohydrate. For example:



Fruit and Veg: Fruits contain natural fruit sugars, whilst vegetables contain varying amounts of starchy carbs.



Proteins: Most protein foods are carb free, although some (e.g., pulses, nuts and beans) do contain starchy carbs.

Ultra-processed foods containing protein can be high in carbs, such as sausages or burgers with a low meat content and products that are battered or in breadcrumbs.



Fats: Most fats are virtually carb free in their natural form. However, ultra-processed foods (such as biscuits, cakes, chips, crisps or chocolate) have a high carb content as they combine fat with things such as sugar, flour or potatoes.

Dairy products are an exception to this, as they often contain natural milk sugars. Hard cheeses such as cheddar are virtually carb free though.

Once you are happy with the **AMOUNT** of carbohydrate you are having, you should then consider the **TYPE** of carbohydrate you are having. Swapping quicker-releasing carbohydrates (which have a higher glycaemic index, or GI) for slower-releasing (lower GI) foods may have additional benefits, for example.

In practice this usually means minimising or avoiding refined carbohydrates, like those found in most breads and breakfast cereals, and choosing minimally processed options like wholegrains, nuts, or pulses instead.

































This topic is explored further on X-PERT programmes and in X-PERT Handbooks. For more information, visit www.xperthealth.org.uk.



Examples of Carbohydrate-Containing Foods



Breakfast		Cereal		Bread		Crumpets
		Fruit		Yoghurt		Jam & marmalade
Lunch and Evening Meal		Bread, chapati & naan		Potato		Takeaways & ready meals
		Pie		Chips		Pasta & sauce
		Rice		Pulses		Battered chicken or fish
Plus small amounts of carbohydrate in salad and vegetables						
Drinks		Juice		Milk		Sugar in drinks
		Fizzy drinks		Malted drinks		Alcoholic drinks
Snacks and Desserts		Biscuits & scones		Fruit		Ice cream
		Cakes & muffins		Sweets		Puddings & custards
		Nuts		Crisps		Chocolate