

Carbohydrates: Making them count!

There's a lot in the news lately about carbohydrates in the food we eat. Are they good for you? How do they relate to the rising rates of obesity in adults and children?

Carbohydrates are the sugars and starches in some foods. They are important because they give the body the energy it needs to function. Sweet tasting and processed foods, like cookies, cake, soda, fruit drinks, candy, white bread, white rice, white pasta, and even potatoes contain carbohydrates that the body digests quickly and easily. Other foods, like whole grain bread, whole wheat pasta, brown rice, dry beans, oatmeal, and fruit have carbohydrates that the body digests more slowly.

What's the problem?

When we eat carbohydrates, the body turns them into a fuel, called glucose, to give the power needed to walk, talk, think, blink, breathe, and more. Have you ever felt hungry and tired before mealtime? That's because your body is running low on glucose.

Too much of a good thing

There are problems when the body makes too much glucose. Extra glucose is stored in the body as fat. If the body is very active, that fat is used for extra energy. Fat that isn't used continues to be saved and that can lead to unnecessary weight gain or obesity.

What can you do?

Remember, the body needs some carbohydrates to function. If you take all of them away, you won't have the energy needed to get through each day. The best carbohydrates are the ones that are digested slowly in the body. They aren't broken down into glucose quickly, so the body has more of a chance to use the glucose before it is turned into fat.

Watch those carbs

- Eat sugary desserts less often. Choose fruit instead.
- Serve more whole grain foods like whole wheat bread, brown rice, oatmeal, whole grain pasta, whole grain crackers and cereal instead of white bread, white rice and foods made only with refined grains. Avoid oversized portions.
- Serve lots of fruits and vegetables. Variety is key.
- Check nutrition labels for added sugars. Choose those that have fewer added sugars and be aware of other names for sugar – honey, cane sugar, corn syrup, sucrose, fructose, malt syrup, molasses.
- Drink water instead of sugary drinks (soda, sports drinks, fruit flavored drinks, sweetened tea).
- Limit juice to 100% fruit juice in a 4-6 oz. serving no more than once a day.

The best carbohydrates are digested slowly.

Cauliflower mashed “potatoes”

1 medium-head cauliflower,
or 1 package (about 1 lb.) frozen, about 4 cups

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup low fat milk

2-3 Tbsp. vegetable oil

Salt and pepper, to taste

Break the cauliflower into pieces (equal in size) and place in a microwave safe bowl or steamer. Sprinkle with water and cover. Steam until it is fork-tender. Fresh cauliflower may take 4 to 6 minutes in the microwave; frozen cauliflower may take 8 to 10 minutes. Drain it well and let the cauliflower cool slightly.

Heat the milk in a small saucepan and pour into a blender or food processor. Add 2 Tbsp. oil and the cauliflower in small batches. Purée until smooth. (For just a bit of texture, leave a few small pieces of cauliflower in the mix.) The mixture should be fluffy. If the purée is too dry or thick, put the blender on low speed and gradually add more oil in small batches until desired consistency is reached. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Makes 4 ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup) servings.

Mashed cauliflower can be treated just like regular mashed potatoes. If you have a favorite topping or flavor for your mashed potatoes, try it with this recipe. After puréeing, you could add curry powder, reduced-fat cheddar cheese, Parmesan cheese, fresh chives or scallions.

The body needs some carbohydrates to function.

Spanish chicken and rice casserole

1 box (6 oz.) quick-cooking brown rice ($1\frac{2}{3}$ cups)

1 small onion, chopped

1 Tbsp. vegetable oil

1 can (14.5 oz.) stewed tomatoes

1 can (14.5 oz.) chicken broth

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped green pepper

1 tsp. paprika

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. dried oregano

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

1 large, skinless, boneless chicken breast (about $\frac{3}{4}$ lb.), cut into 1-inch pieces

1 bay leaf

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup frozen green peas

Salt, to taste

Preheat oven to 375°F. In a 2-quart casserole dish, combine rice, onion and oil. Add tomatoes, broth, paprika, oregano, ground pepper, green pepper, chicken and bay leaf. Stir, then cover and bake for 25 minutes.

Stir in peas and continue to bake, uncovered, for an additional 25 minutes or until broth is absorbed. Remove bay leaf and serve.

Makes 6 servings.

Fruited rice

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup chopped dry apricots, cherries or cranberries

$\frac{1}{3}$ cup raisins

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups quick-cooking brown rice

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ Tbsp. chicken bouillon granules

1 Tbsp. dried parsley (or 3–4 Tbsp. fresh)

2 tsp. grated orange rind, or to taste

$\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. onion powder

Place dried fruit and raisins in small bowl. Add water to cover. Let soak for about 5–10 minutes, then drain.

In large saucepan, boil water as listed on rice package directions. When water comes to a boil, add rice, fruit, raisins, bouillon, parsley, orange rind, and onion powder. Reduce heat.

Cover and simmer for 10 minutes, or until water is absorbed. Remove from heat and fluff gently with fork before serving.

Makes 6 servings.

Dietary cautions

- Be aware of choking risks and food allergies when preparing and serving meals and snacks. Think about the size, shape, and consistency when choosing foods due to the potential choking risks in children. Food cut in large chunks, small hard foods, and soft and sticky foods should be avoided. The top choking hazards for children include: hotdogs, meats, sausages, fish with bones, spoonfuls of peanut butter, popcorn, chips, pretzel nuggets, raisins,

whole grapes, raw carrots, fruits and vegetables with skins, and marshmallows. Be sure that food is cut in small pieces (no larger than $\frac{1}{2}$ inch), grated, or finely chopped. Be sure that children are closely supervised when they are eating.

- Do not give honey to children under 12 months of age. Honey contains spores that can cause infant botulism.
- Many children have food allergies or sensitivities to food. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, 90% of children's food allergies are from milk, eggs, peanuts,

tree nuts (pecan/walnuts), fish, shellfish, strawberries, soy, wheat, and gluten. Carefully read food labels for potential risks and be sure to ask the parents if children have a known allergy or sensitivity.

- Dental health is a growing concern with young children, so it is important to keep in mind that starchy, sticky, and sugary foods can cause tooth decay. Children should brush their teeth after any meal or snack, but particularly when you serve these foods.

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