

Department of Nutrition & Dietetics
Patient Information

Carbohydrates

Introductory information for people with diabetes

Please note: This is general information and should not replace any personalised advice given to you by your healthcare team.

What is carbohydrate and why does it matter?

Carbohydrate (also known as '**carb**' or '**carbs**') is part of many foods. It is one of the main food groups; the other food groups are fat and protein.

When you eat most types of carb, your body digests it and turns it into simple sugars.

One simple sugar is glucose, which your body uses for energy. This is the sugar some people measure with a finger-prick test and that the doctor measures with a HbA1c blood test.

If you want to understand your blood-glucose levels, then understanding carbs can help.

Where do I find carbs?

Carbs can be either sugar or starch. Both will affect your blood glucose levels. Many foods contain carbs but the main ones are:

- Bread
- Rice
- Pasta
- Potato
- Breakfast Cereal
- Flour
- Oats
- Beans & lentils
- Sugar, honey & syrup
- Fruit & fruit juice
- Milk, yoghurt & ice cream
- Sweets & chocolate
- Puddings, cakes & biscuits

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Publication Date: 06/15
Review Date: 06/18

Your blood glucose will be affected by **how much** carb food/drink you eat.

- If you have a high blood glucose level, you may have eaten too much carbohydrate
- If you have a low blood glucose level, you may not have eaten enough carbohydrate

If your blood glucose levels are often high or low, it may be that as well as looking at the carb you eat, your diabetes medication may need review; please contact your diabetes nurse or doctor.

Other things will also affect your blood glucose levels, like your activity levels and illness but it is important to eat regularly through the day and to have some carb at each meal.

- Eating regularly means not going for long periods without carbs (try not to skip meals) and also not binging on carbs by eating very large portions or grazing on them all the time

Where can I find out more?

If you are newly diagnosed with Type 2 Diabetes, then your GP can refer you to a diabetes education session where you will get information from a dietitian and diabetes nurse.

If you use basal bolus insulin (people who use a long-acting insulin plus a short-acting insulin with their food), then carbohydrate education is available online at www.bdec-e-learning.com . This website has been set up by Bournemouth Diabetes and Endocrine Centre and is recommended by Diabetes UK and Dorset County Hospital Dietitians.

If you have any questions or would like more advice on food and diabetes, please ask a diabetes dietitian.

Useful contacts

Diabetes Centre
Dorset County Hospital
Tel: 01305 255211
Email: dietetic.secretary@dchft.nhs.uk

Diabetes UK Careline
Tel: 0345 123 2399 (charges apply)
Email: careline@diabetes.org.uk