



Dietetics Department

Carbohydrates Introductory Information for People with Diabetes

What is carbohydrate and why does it matter?

Carbohydrate (also known as 'carb' or 'carbs') is part of many foods. 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 your doctor measures with an 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 have carbs in them, but the main ones are:

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

This list does not tell you if these foods are 'healthy' or 'unhealthy', only that they contain carb and will affect your blood glucose level.

Your blood glucose will be affected by **how much** of these foods 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, you may need diabetes medication; please talk to your diabetes nurse.

Other things will affect your blood glucose levels too, 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), as well as not having very large portions of carb or grazing on them a lot.
- Activity can really help to keep blood glucose levels down. Especially if you are active after meals.

Which foods do not have carbs?

- Cheese
- Eggs
- Meat or tofu
- Oils and spreads
- Coloured vegetables
- Fish
- Nuts
- Sugar-free drinks

These foods do not have much carb in them. They can all be part of a healthy, balanced diet. Try to eat lots of different foods; too much of any one food is not healthy.

Contact Numbers:

We hope that you have found this information useful. If you have any questions or would like more advice on food and diabetes, please speak to the Dorset County Hospital Diabetes Dietitians - see the Diabetes Centre phone number and email below.

Diabetes Dietitians:
Dorset County Hospital Diabetes Centre
Tel: 01305 255211
Email: diabetes.secretaries@dchft.nhs.uk

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

Useful Websites:

It is healthy to eat lots of different types of food. Please look at this website or ask your Healthcare Professional if you want to find out more about healthy eating:-

<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/healthy-eating.html>

About this leaflet:

Author: Isabel Hooley, Diabetes Dietitian
Written: 2017
Updated & Approved: January 2022
Review Date: January 2025
Edition: v3

If you have feedback regarding the accuracy of the information contained in this leaflet, or if you would like a list of references used to develop this leaflet, please email pals@dchft.nhs.uk



© 2022 Dorset County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
Williams Avenue, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 2JY
www.dchft.nhs.uk