



DIABETES MANAGEMENT
— ASSOCIATES —

CARBOHYDRATE COUNTING-BASICS

WHY ARE CARBOHYDRATES IMPORTANT?

Carbohydrates are a necessary source of energy or fuel we receive from foods. Your body turns carbohydrates into glucose. Then insulin moves carbohydrates into the cells where it can be used. Every cell in the body MUST have a source of energy. The body uses fat and protein as fuel when there is not enough carbohydrates. The brain MUST have carbohydrates to function.

Besides carbohydrates being a source of energy, carbohydrates also provide necessary mineral and vitamins.

The old suggestion of 'just limiting foods that contain sugar or whites' is not correct. There is no longer any 'forbidden' or 'diabetic' foods. All carbohydrates affect your blood glucose levels and must be the main source of food.

WHICH FOODS CONTAIN CARBOHYDRATES?

- **ANYTHING THAT GROWS**
- Bread, cereal, pasta, grains, rice, beans, vegetables, fruit, milk (very little), yogurt
- Snack foods such as cakes, pretzels, cookies and sodas have sugar added and contain large amounts of carbohydrates.
- Get the most out of your food by eating healthy, non-starchy carbohydrates which have little processing and are higher in fiber. These include: whole grain breads/pastas and fresh fruits and vegetable such as leafy green vegetables (spinach), legumes, lettuce, tomatoes, onions, green beans, broccoli, carrots, sweet potatoes, fruit and yogurt.
- Limit starchy carbohydrates such as potatoes, corn, peas

HOW DO I KNOW HOW MANY CARBOHYDRATES ARE IN FOODS?

To know how many carbohydrates are in foods, you need to learn to read food labels looking for TOTAL carbohydrates. Starch, fiber and sugar are types of carbohydrates.

HOW MANY CARBOHYDRATES SHOULD I EAT A DAY?

- The amount of carbohydrates you need depends on age, weight, gender and level of activity.
- Carbohydrates should not be removed or limited in your meals but should be 45-65% of your food intake.
- For women: about 45-60 grams of carbohydrates per meal and a 30 gram snack (if desired) or about 150-180 grams of carbohydrates in a day
- For men: about 60-75 grams of carbohydrates per meal and a 30 gram snack (if desired) or about 180-200 grams of carbohydrates in a day.
- A good estimation of carbohydrates can be done by using the plate method:
 - $\frac{1}{2}$ of the plate should contain non-starchy carbohydrates
 - $\frac{1}{4}$ of the plate can be starchy carbohydrates
 - $\frac{1}{4}$ of the plate should be proteins such as meat, nuts, eggs and milk

- You should eat 2 servings of fruits and 4-6 servings of non-starchy vegetables every day. One serving of carbohydrates is 15 grams and is:
 - ½ cup of cooked vegetables
 - ½ cup vegetable juice
 - 1 cup raw vegetables

HOW DO I COUNT CARBOHYDRATES WHEN EATING OUT?

- This is easier than expected. Most fast food places and restaurants can provide a menu containing carbohydrates. You will probably have to ask though!!
- Many carbohydrate books contain information about places to eat out.
- Most restaurant servings are MUCH larger than what the average American needs. Tips:
 - When meals arrives at the table, immediately place half the meal into a carry-out container to take home.
 - Seek out portion descriptors that mean small portions such as junior, single, petite, kiddie and regular.
 - Split a meal with someone.
- Avoid all-you-can-eat and buffets. We have a tendency to 'want to get our money's worth'.
- Many resources are available online such as a specific restaurant or general web sites such as:
 - Calorie King (www.calorieking.com)