

## Have Your Carbs and Eat Them Too!

A recent diet program that had everyone swooning was high in fats, low in carbohydrates, and claimed it was the healthiest way for people to lose weight and keep it off. This diet allowed lots of red meat, full fat cheese, eggs and cream, but allowed little if any fresh fruits and vegetables for the first few weeks. Many other low carb diet plans and diet pills designed to help people stay on a low carb diet followed. People did lose weight on these plans, but their bodies, needing more nutrients than they were receiving rebelled, and weight crept back up as bored dieters returned to their old habits. Any diet plan that forbids certain food groups can be dangerous to your overall health and well-being.

Carbohydrates play an important role in our diets. Choosing the right carbohydrates to fuel our bodies and sustain healthy muscles, nervous system and brain function is challenging, yet simple.

Sweets, jams, jelly and sweeteners like honey, molasses and syrups are simple sugar carbohydrates that have no intrinsic nutritional value, and can cause dangerous surges in blood sugar that increases insulin into the blood stream. White bread, white pasta and many packaged and processed foods contain simple carbs that are quickly consumed by the body, causing increased hunger, leading to weight gain, and can put certain people at a risk for diabetes.

Complex carbs, found in whole grain rice, bread, and legumes such as peas, beans, lentils and soybeans contain fiber that enter the body more slowly, are digested gradually, giving you a feeling of fullness, keeping sugar levels near constant, and stabilizing your appetite. They contain the vitamins, minerals, and fiber that promote good health.

Knowing how the body reacts to carbs is the first step in choosing healthy carbs in your diet. This does not mean you cannot have your favorite treats in moderation. It does mean that you should eat more complex carbs than simple, as they are less likely to be stored as fat in your body like their simple carb cousins.

Fruits and vegetables contain both simple and complex carbs, essential vitamins, minerals, fiber and other nutrients and should be a staple in your diet. Fruits contain unprocessed natural sugar, and are the perfect choice for a snack or dessert. Milk and dairy products contain simple carbohydrates but are also a source of calcium, vitamins and minerals.

A breakfast of whole grain cereal or whole grain toast and plain yogurt sweetened with a teaspoon of honey helps get you through the morning. A sliced apple, banana, or pear with raisins is a great mid-morning snack. Fresh berries are a powerhouse of healthy carbs, and can be added to cereal, yogurt or eaten by themselves. A parfait with alternate layers of yogurt and berries, topped with sliced almonds, walnut pieces or pecans makes an elegant, healthy dessert.

Variety is the key to any successful diet. Go ahead and eat that piece of cake or candy. Enjoy that cookie or ice cream, but remember to balance these foods containing simple carbs with those with carbs that are more complex. Get into the habit of reaching for a piece of fruit, some air popped or light microwave popcorn, vegetable munchies, and you'll find yourself looking better, feeling better and your body will reward you by giving you good health, and plenty of energy.

Finally, if you have any dietary allergies, or are diabetic, you should always take the advice of your health care professional.