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Carbohydrate Counting

Carbohydrate counting, or "[carb counting](#)," is a meal planning technique for managing your blood glucose levels.

Foods that contain [carbohydrate raise blood glucose](#). By keeping track of how many grams of carbohydrate you eat and setting a limit for your maximum amount to eat, you can help to keep your blood glucose levels in your target range.

Finding the right amount of carbohydrate depends on many things including how active you are and what, if any, medicines you take. You may also be interested in our book, [Diabetes Carbohydrate & Fat Gram Guide](#).

How Much Carb?

A place to start is at about 45-60 grams of carbohydrate at a meal. You may need more or less carbohydrate at meals depending on how you manage your diabetes. You and your health care team can figure out the right amount for you. Once you know how much carb to eat at a meal, choose your food and the portion size to match.

What Foods Have Carbohydrate?

Foods that contain carbohydrate are:

- starchy foods like bread, cereal, rice, and crackers
- fruit and juice
- milk and yogurt
- dried beans like pinto beans and soy products like veggie burgers
- starchy vegetables like potatoes and corn
- sweets and snack foods like sodas, juice drinks, cake, cookies, candy, and chips

Non-starchy vegetables have a little bit of carbohydrate but in general are very low.

How Much Carbohydrate is in These Foods?

Reading food labels is a great way to know how much carbohydrate is in a food. For foods that do not have a label, you have to estimate how much carbohydrate is in it. Keeping general serving sizes in mind will help you estimate how much carbohydrate you are eating.

For example there is about **15 grams of carbohydrate** in:

- 1 small piece of fresh fruit (4 oz)
- 1/2 cup of canned or frozen fruit
- 1 slice of bread (1 oz) or 1 (6 inch) tortilla
- 1/2 cup of oatmeal
- 1/3 cup of pasta or rice
- 4-6 crackers
- 1/2 English muffin or hamburger bun
- 1/2 cup of black beans or starchy vegetable
- 1/4 of a large baked potato (3 oz)
- 2/3 cup of plain fat-free yogurt or sweetened with sugar substitutes
- 2 small cookies
- 2 inch square brownie or cake without frosting
- 1/2 cup ice cream or sherbet
- 1 Tbsp syrup, jam, jelly, sugar or honey

- 2 Tbsp light syrup
- 6 chicken nuggets
- 1/2 cup of casserole
- 1 cup of soup
- 1/4 serving of a medium french fry

Protein and Fat

With carbohydrate counting, it is easy to forget about the protein and fat in meals. Always include a source of protein and fat to balance out your meal.

Using Food Labels

Carbohydrate counting is easier when food labels are available. You can look at how much carbohydrate is in the foods you want to eat and decide how much of the food you can eat. The two most important lines with carbohydrate counting are the serving size and the total carbohydrate amount.

- Look at the **serving size**. All the information on the label is about this serving of food. If you will be eating a larger serving, then you will need to double or triple the information on the label.
- Look at the **grams of total carbohydrate**.
 - Total carbohydrate on the label includes sugar, starch, and fiber.
 - Know the amount of carb you can eat, figure out the portion size to match.
- If you are trying to lose weight, look at the **calories**. Comparing products can be helpful to find those lower in calories per serving.
- To cut risk of heart disease and stroke, look at **saturated and trans fats**. Look for products with the lowest amount of saturated and trans fats per serving.
- **For people with high blood pressure, look at the sodium. Look for foods with less sodium.**