

Outpost Exchange
Carbohydrates Sidebar
By Maggie Jacobus
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678 Words

Are you suffering from “carb confusion”? You are not alone and we are here to help.

We are told carbohydrates are good for energy, then told to avoid them like the plague, then advised to eat only certain kinds of carbs. Part of the problem is that “carbohydrates” span so many kinds of foods—from candy to cauliflower. Adding to the carbohydrate cacophony are concepts such as the glycemic index, which refers to how quickly the carbohydrate is absorbed into your body as glucose.

Independent nutritionist Larry Johansen, M.S., of Proactive HealthCare Solutions is a coach and teacher. He weighs in with the skinny on carbs.

Carbohydrates can be put into three categories:

- 1) **Sugars**, which consist of monosaccharides and disaccharides, such as table sugar, corn syrup and honey.
- 2) **Starches**, which Johansen calls “big long chains of sugar, that, when digested and absorbed may as well be table sugar.” This would include potatoes, rice, beans, rice cakes, cereal and bread.
- 3) **Fiber**, which Johansen describes as “big long chains of sugar, but combined in such a way that the body can’t digest them, so they go through the intestines like a scrub brush.” High fiber foods include most fruits and vegetables, such as apples and broccoli.

Looking at a food label, however, you will only find sugars and fiber listed, as well as a total carbohydrates number. What’s missing? The starch content, which eventually becomes sugar in your system. And excessive sugar is what can send your body into energy crescendos and crashes. It all comes down to understanding how much sugar—in all its myriad forms—you are ingesting. “It’s as if the marketing folks have tried to make starch invisible,” Johansen said. “If you only look at total carbohydrates on a food label, you can’t tell what’s fiber, what’s sugar and what’s starch.”

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Carbo Sidebar—Add One

To dissect your diet, Johansen suggests reading a food label this way: take the total carbohydrates number and subtract the fiber number. What is left is what he calls the “net carbohydrates” number, which is the combination of sugars and starch that ends up in your body. “The net carbohydrate is the eventual glycemic—or sugar—load entering your body,” he said. Johansen recommends limiting net carbohydrates on a per meal basis to between 27 grams and 45 grams.

You may be surprised how quickly those net carbs can creep up on you. As an example, to obtain just nine grams of net carbohydrates you could eat **one** of the following choices:

- 20 cups of chopped spinach
- 1/4 cup cooked pasta
- 1/3 of a banana
- About 2 ounces of fruit juice (which can pack as much as 18-20 grams of net carbs, depending on the type of juice)
- 1 cup of strawberries
- ¼ cantelope

“Healthy” choices can be deceptive as well. A bottled energy drink may have ginkgo biloba, fruit juice and other wonderful ingredients, but the net carb level can be as high as 30 or 40 grams. That’s your limit for the meal. One cup of chocolate flavored soy milk has no saturated fat and 5 grams of protein...but it also has 23 grams of net carbohydrates. Add ½ of a banana and you’re maxed out for the meal.

-more-

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Carb sidebar—Add Two

Why should we even care about carbs? Beyond getting a handle on the energy swings you may experience by ingesting too many net carbohydrates in one sitting, there is the issue of elevated insulin. “Elevated insulin is a silent epidemic that goes hand in hand with increased weight,” Johansen stated. “If insulin is elevated, it results in physiological stress.” Elevated insulin can lead to Type II diabetes and heart disease. Type II diabetes can result in kidney failure, blindness or amputation of extremities. Elevated insulin also appears to cause the cravings we have for sweets and starches. “Regulating the intake of net carbohydrates—sugar and starch—will regulate insulin, help to eliminate cravings and decrease risk of disease,” Johansen said.

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