

Carbohydrate Mythbusters!

The main role of carbohydrates is to provide energy and fuel the body the same way gasoline fuels a car. Carbohydrates break down into blood sugar, or glucose. Carbohydrates are the preferred fuel source for both your muscles and your brain. Here are some common myths about carbohydrates and the truth behind them.



Myth 1: Only Breads and Grains Contain Carbohydrates

Most plant-based foods contain carbohydrates. Carbohydrates are the sugars, starches and fibers found in fruits, vegetables, grains and milk products.

Myth 2: Carbohydrates Are Fattening

The research shows that in the long-term, calories count more than the percentage of any one macronutrient (protein, carbohydrate or fat).

Whole grain breads, cereals and pasta, as well as oats and quinoa, are loaded with fiber and will keep you feeling full for longer. They also have more nutrients than refined and processed grains. Choosing these foods over less healthy carbohydrates like cake, cookies or doughnuts is a better way to control weight.

Myth 3: All White Foods Are Unhealthy

While foods made from refined flours and grains are missing fiber and nutrients, whole white foods such as cauliflower, garlic, mushrooms and leeks (and even potatoes), are high in nutrients.

Potatoes are a great source of potassium and vitamin C. For potatoes, choose yellow, red and purple-skinned varieties rather than the white starchy russet potato. These varieties have less of a glycemic load and won't have as much of an effect on blood sugar.

Myth 4: Low-Carb Diets Are Healthier

While there is evidence suggesting that low-carb diets can produce positive effects in the short term, this type of diet may not be sustainable for most people. Eliminating refined and processed sources of carbohydrates and emphasizing whole grains, fruits and vegetables as well as healthy sources of fats and proteins can promote weight control and ensure you are getting all of the essential nutrients

Myth 5: Carbs Cause Inflammation

Chronic inflammation is a concern because it may be linked to obesity, cancer, CVD, and other chronic diseases. One reason that whole grains may reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes is by reducing inflammation. High intake of whole grains has been shown to reduce inflammation, while foods low in fiber but high in sugars and starches may promote inflammation.

Myth 6: Avoid Fruit Due to High Sugar Content

While it's true that the main source of calories in whole fruit is sugar, predominantly fructose, those sugars are surrounded by fiber, preventing a blood sugar response that you would get from eating a chocolate chip cookie. They're also loaded with vitamins and minerals.

Myth 7: Sugar-Free = Carb-Free

Carbohydrates include starches and fiber as well as sugars. A food can be sugar-free while still containing carbohydrate.

Myth 8: All Carbs Are the Same No Matter Where They Come From

Many people think that all carbs are created equal, whether they come from soda, sugary cereal, or brown rice. But quality and quantity matter when it comes to carbohydrates.

High-fiber fruits, vegetables, grains and legumes, as well as low-fat dairy shouldn't be a concern as long as you're staying within your calorie range. High-glycemic foods like white flour breads, pastas and sweets cause a higher rise in blood sugar after eating and should be consumed in limited amounts.

Myth 9: All Simple Carbs Are Bad; All Complex Carbs Are Good

As stated above, all carbs are not created equally. Simple carbs and complex carbs both come in whole and refined forms. Simple carbohydrates contain sugar, and that can include an apple, a glass of milk, or a soda.

Complex carbohydrates are starches and fiber and that can include a slice of white bread or whole wheat pasta. White bread can raise insulin levels as much as table sugar.