

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates (or carbs) are our body's main source of fuel. We need them to keep our energy levels up and keep our brain alert. It's important to have some carbohydrates with each meal.

Which foods are good sources of healthy carbohydrates?

Several foods are good sources of healthy carbohydrates. They include:

- wholegrain bread and breakfast cereals
- brown rice and wholegrain pasta
- wholegrains such as buckwheat, millet, quinoa, and rolled oats
- starchy vegetables such as potato, kumara, taro, corn, and yams
- fruit
- legumes such as baked beans, lentils, chickpeas, and kidney beans.



Some carbohydrates are better for us than others are. Highly processed and sugary carbohydrates such as white bread, sugary cereals, cakes and biscuits provide fuel for our brains but do little to help us stay healthy. They also tend to be high in energy (kilojoules or calories) and don't keep us feeling full for long. Quality carbohydrates, like the ones in the list above, provide not only energy but also many of the vitamins and minerals our bodies need to be healthy.

What about fibre?

We need carbohydrate foods that also contain fibre to keep our gut (intestines, or bowel) healthy. Fibre is food that we don't break down and absorb, but which provides food for the good bacteria that live in our gut. It's essential for keeping our gut healthy. It's also really important for helping us feel full and preventing constipation.

Eating a lot of high-fibre foods can reduce our chances of getting heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and bowel cancer. It can also help us to stay a healthy weight. High-fibre foods feed the good bacteria in our gut (gut microbiota), which helps to keep us and our gut healthy.



How much carbohydrate should I have?

You should have at least five servings of vegetables and fruit every day. A serving is about a handful, so the amount varies depending on the person. The Heart Foundation has a handy factsheet that shows you how to use hand size to judge portion size. See

heartfoundation.org.nz/shop/nutrition/docs/food-portions-a4.pdf.

Try to include legumes such as lentils, chick peas, and kidney beans, in a couple of meals every week. The Heart Foundation's free Full O'Beans cookbook

(heartfoundation.org.nz/resources/full-o-beans-cookbook), has more information about legumes and how to cook them, as well as recipes for using them.

Include a portion of carbohydrates such as bread, cereals, rice, pasta, or starchy vegetables at every meal. Choose wholemeal or whole grain varieties. A portion is about the size of your closed fist, and like a portion of vegetables, varies with every person. Eating too much of any food, even of good carbohydrates, will make you put on weight, so watch your portion size.

 *HealthInfo recommends the following pages*

- Health Promotion Agency – Behind the hype: carbohydrates
(nutritionandactivity.govt.nz/sites/default/files/Carbohydrates%202019.pdf)
Information about carbohydrates and healthy eating.

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