

Nutrition Lesson 3

Carbohydrates

Your Fit Life goal for the week:

Choose one area of carbohydrate intake to improve upon this week. (Reference your nutrition assessment from earlier in the program if you need to.) You can choose to add a serving of fruit or vegetables to your diet each day, or aim to make half of your grain intake whole grain options instead of refined grains.

This week, we turn our attention to a major part of the nutrition discussion – carbohydrate intake. Along with proteins and fats, carbohydrates provide all of the energy requirements for the body. In fact, carbs themselves serve as the primary source of energy, making up 45-65% of total intake in a healthy diet.

When consumed, carbs are broken down and stored in the liver and muscles, and later used for energy in movement or exercise. If you don't consume enough carbohydrates in your diet, metabolism can suffer and energy levels could be very low. But if we take in too much of certain types of carbs, the excess is stored as fat. This is why it's extremely important to understand what carbohydrates are and how to best use them in your diet.

Everything that is planted or grows from the ground is a carbohydrate. Vegetables, fruits, and grain products are all carbs. And the closer any of the items are to their most natural form when you eat them, the healthier they are for you. A diet that consists primarily of fruits, veggies, and some whole grain products has numerous health benefits.

Vegetables provide high levels of nutrients without excess calories. Along with fruits, veggies also provide fiber, an essential element in bodily function. Our bodies can't break down fiber, so it passes through the body without providing any energy. But fiber still plays an important role, helping to lower cholesterol, protect against heart disease, facilitate bowel movements, and prevent constipation. Fiber also stays in the stomach longer than other carbohydrates, giving us a "full" feeling for a longer period of time.

When eating grain products such as bread, rice and pasta, the USDA recommends making "half your grains whole." This means you should opt for whole grain products (like wheat bread, brown rice, and whole grain pasta) over refined grains. Refined grains like white bread and white rice have been highly processed, with much of the nutritional value stripped away. Again, think about consuming foods that are closest to their most natural state, and you'll find that your diet is healthier overall.

For more on carbohydrates, check out these resources from TD Fitness:

- [Carbohydrates and You – 4 Keys to Better Health](#)
- [The Important Role of Fiber](#)
- [Carbs Aren't the Enemy](#)