

Carbohydrates

Simple carbohydrates: These are also called simple sugars. Simple sugars are found in refined sugars, like the white sugar you'd find in a sugar bowl.

Complex carbohydrates: These are also called starches. Starches include grain products, such as bread, crackers, pasta, and rice. As with simple sugars, some complex carbohydrate foods are better choices than others. Refined grains, such as white flour and white rice, have been processed, which removes nutrients and fiber. But unrefined grains still contain these [vitamins](#) and [minerals](#). Unrefined grains also are rich in fiber, which helps your [digestive system](#) work well. Fiber helps you feel full, so you are less likely to overeat these foods. That explains why a bowl of oatmeal fills you up better than sugary candy with the same amount of calories as the oatmeal.

When you eat carbs, your body breaks them down into simple sugars, which are absorbed into the bloodstream. As the sugar level rises in your body, the pancreas releases a [hormone](#) called insulin. Insulin is needed to move sugar from the blood into the cells, where the sugar can be used as a source of energy.

When this process goes fast — as with simple sugars — you're more likely to feel hungry again soon. When it occurs more slowly, as with a whole-grain food, you'll be satisfied longer. These types of complex carbohydrates give you energy over a longer period of time.

WHY DO WE NEED CARBOHYDRATES?

Carbohydrates are the macronutrient that we need in the largest amounts. According to the Dietary Reference Intakes published by the USDA, 45% - 65% of calories should come from carbohydrate. We need this amount of carbohydrate because:

- Carbohydrates are the body's main source of fuel.
- Carbohydrates are easily used by the body for energy.
- All of the tissues and cells in our body use glucose for energy.
- Carbohydrates are needed for the central nervous system, the kidneys, the brain, the muscles (including the heart) to function properly.
- Carbohydrates can be stored in the muscles and liver and later used for energy.
- Carbohydrates are important in intestinal health and waste elimination.

- Carbohydrates are mainly found in starchy foods (like grain and potatoes), fruits, milk, and yogurt. Other foods like vegetables, beans, nuts, seeds and cottage cheese contain carbohydrates, but in lesser amounts.

Fiber refers to certain types of carbohydrates that our body cannot digest. These carbohydrates pass through the intestinal tract intact and help to move waste out of the body. Diets that are low in fiber have been shown to cause problems such as constipation and hemorrhoids and to increase the risk for certain types of cancers such as colon cancer. Diets high in fiber; however, have been shown to decrease risks for heart disease, obesity, and they help lower cholesterol. Foods high in fiber include fruits, vegetables, and whole grain products.