

Sources of Carbohydrates

What are carbohydrates?

Carbohydrates (carbs) are found in most foods and drinks. Your body needs them for energy, but eating too many can cause weight gain and high blood sugar. Your body needs insulin to use carbohydrates, which is why they affect blood sugar levels. Many people are advised to eat fewer carbohydrates. Carbohydrates that are **low in fiber** often have more sugar, fructose, or lactose. This means they may have more calories and cause blood sugar to rise quickly.



Choose the carbohydrates that will support your health goals!

Processed foods are foods or drinks that have been changed from their natural form. Sometimes they have added ingredients (about three or more). Many can be part of a healthy diet, but most contain carbohydrates, and some have added sugars.

Ultra-processed foods have been changed a lot from their natural form. They often have added sugar, salt, and saturated fat. They may have a long ingredient list to improve taste, appearance, and shelf life.

Helpful Tips

- Choose vegetables and fruit that are fresh, frozen, or canned in “natural” or “lite” syrup (avoid heavy syrup).
- See *Sources of Protein* and *Sources of Fat* lists for carbohydrate info in foods where most calories come from protein or fat.
- Visit the UW Center for Weight Loss and Metabolic Surgery website to watch the free **Eat Well Be Well Nutrition Series** videos to learn more.

Types of Carbohydrates

Your body uses 7 main types of carbohydrate for energy, to prevent ketosis, and they require insulin to be absorbed. Check the ingredient list for:

- Glucose
- Maltose
- Cellulose (gum or gel often in ice cream, frozen yogurt)
- Fructose (fruit, vegetables, high-fructose corn syrup)
- Galactose (dairy)
- Lactose (dairy)
- Sucrose (table sugar)
- Starch (arrowroot, cassava, corn, cornstarch, potato, rice, tapioca, wheat)



Scan for a
digital copy of
this handout.

Types of Carbohydrates

- **Dried:** Read the ingredient list to make sure the dried food matches what's on the package. Dried fruit may have added sugar and is dehydrated into smaller pieces.
- **Beans:** Examples include adzuki, black bean, black-eyed pea, borlotti, cannellini, chickpea, cranberry bean, edamame, fava, great northern, kidney, lima, lupine, mung, pinto, roman, soy, split pea.
- **Lentils:** Examples include brown, black, beluga, red, green, golden, yellow, and dal.
- **Grains:** Examples include amaranth, barley, buckwheat, bulgur, corn, farro, freekeh, khorasan, millet, oats, quinoa, rice, rye sorghum, spelt, teff, and wheat.
- **Fruit:** 100% of the calories in fruit come from carbohydrate (fructose) alone.
- **Vegetables:** All vegetables have some carbohydrates. Some frozen or canned vegetables have added sugar.
- **Nuts and Seeds:** All nuts and seeds contain some carbohydrates. Most nut and seed butters have added sugar.
- **Dairy:** These include lactose (milk sugar), and some have added sugar. Examples include cheese, cottage cheese, milk, and yogurt. All milk alternatives have carbohydrates, and some have added sugar.

Most of the examples below are ultra-processed and have low fiber.

- **Cereal:** Examples include instant cereal, all sweet beverages, juice, chocolates, candies, bakery products, donuts, ice cream, frozen desserts, snack foods, instant noodles, white bread, biscuits, fat-free, fast food, chicken nuggets, French fries, frozen pizza, frozen meals processed meats (deli, hot dogs, bacon, sausage, salami, pepperoni, etc). Products labeled zero-carb, low-carb, net-carb, or keto have excessive added fiber.
- **Desserts:** Bakery products, pastries, brownies, baklava, cake, cheesecake, cookies, croissants, custard, donuts, frozen desserts, pastries, pie, short-bread, strudel, tarts, and many more.
- **High-sugar foods:** Agave, barbeque sauce, chocolate or strawberry milk, flavored alternative milks (soy, almond, oat, etc.), fruit yogurt (especially Elleno's type), honey, honey mustard, jam, jelly, ketchup, syrup, sweet and sour sauce, sugar of all colors and types (white, brown, raw, etc.), Szechuan
- **Sauces and Condiments:** Light, fat-free or regular salad dressings, hoisin, honey-mustard, ketchup, mayonnaise, miracle whip, sriracha, sweet relish, and teriyaki
- **Snack Foods:** Corn nuts, graham crackers, French fries, popcorn, potato chips, protein bars or chips, tortilla or corn chips, veggie chips, protein chips
- **Beverages:** Beer and some alcoholic drinks, energy drinks, juice (regular, light, no-sugar-added) regular soda, sports drinks, electrolyte powders or drinks, latte, coffee creamer
- **Bread and Pasta:** multigrain, seeded, wheat, white, whole grain, and all gluten-free breads all gluten-free, high protein, lentil, low-carb, soy, wheat, and white pastas

How to Limit Ultra-Processed Foods

- Don't keep ultra-processed foods at home.
- Eat them less often, in smaller amounts.
- Buy a smaller or single-serving package.
- Choose fresher options instead.
- Read ingredient labels — pick foods with fewer than 5 ingredients.
- Avoid fruits canned in heavy syrup.
- Avoid pie filling, juice, or juicing as your fruit choice.

Fresher Options:

- Drink water instead of sugary drinks or juice.
- Choose regular milk instead of flavored milk.
- Reduce size of flavored coffee drinks.
- Pick non-battered or non-fried items when eating out.
- Choose fruits fresh, frozen, or canned in natural juice.
- Choose unsweetened and unflavored foods.
- Pick less processed items, like baked chicken instead of deli meat.
- Use steel-cut oats instead of sweetened or flavored instant oats.
- Make your own versions of processed foods — healthy muffins instead of store-bought, homemade frozen dinners from healthy recipes.
- Stock Healthy Snacks
 - Nuts and seeds
 - Fresh or frozen fruit
 - Fresh or frozen vegetables (cut)
 - Plain Greek yogurt dip
- Plan your meals ahead of time! Include:
 - Vegetables and fruit
 - Whole grains you cook yourself
 - Natural protein sources without sugary sauces
 - Healthy fats with carbs (avocado, hummus, nut butter)

As you can see, most food contains a little to a lot of carbohydrates. Wisely choose a variety of foods to see the results you desire.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.