

# Carbohydrates and Diabetes

All kids, including those with diabetes, can and should eat carbohydrates (carbs) as part of a healthy diet.

Kids with diabetes will need to pay closer attention to what they eat, though. Why? Because the more carbs you eat, the more insulin your body will need. Why? Because your body turns carbs into the sugar glucose (say: GLOO-kose), which is used for energy by your cells. And glucose can't get into your cells without insulin (say: IN-suh-lin).

Kids with diabetes have a problem with insulin, so glucose has a hard time getting into the cells:

- In type 1 diabetes, the pancreas doesn't make insulin.
- In type 2 diabetes, the pancreas makes insulin, but the body doesn't use it as it should.

In both types of diabetes, when glucose can't get into the cells, the blood sugar level gets too high. High blood sugar levels can make people sick and are unhealthy.

## Sugar, Starch, and Fiber Are All Carbs

Carbohydrates, found in foods such as bread, fruit, and candy, make your blood sugar rise. So if you have diabetes, you might think you shouldn't eat carbs at all. But carbs are one of the three main components of food (the others are proteins and fats).

Carbohydrates come in three forms: sugar, starch, and fiber. Getting the right balance of these is key to keeping blood sugars in a healthy range. It helps to know that:

- **Added sugars raise the blood sugar quickly.** Foods with added sugar (like cake, cookies, and soft drinks) make blood sugars spike. You might see sugar, corn syrup, dextrose, sucrose, or fructose listed on the food label. Foods that naturally contain sugar (like fresh fruits, milk, and Greek yogurt) don't cause blood sugar to rise as quickly as added sugars and are better for you.
- **Some starches raise the blood sugar slowly.** In general, starches that are less processed tend to raise the blood sugar more slowly. These include foods like brown rice, lentils, and oatmeal. Foods that are processed a lot, like white rice and white bread, raise the blood sugar quickly.
- **Fiber helps slow down sugar absorption.** A diet with plenty of fiber can help kids with diabetes keep blood sugar levels in a healthy range. The fiber in foods helps carbs break into sugar slower. Good sources are whole fruits and vegetables, nuts and seeds, and whole grains. Fiber also helps you feel full, and it keeps the digestive system running smoothly.

Carbs provide the fuel you need to get through the day. Making smart choices when it comes to carbs and following your diabetes care plan can help keep blood sugars under control. If some foods you like aren't currently in your plan, ask your parent or health care team how to include them. If you need help counting carbs or have questions about what to eat, talk to the dietitian on your care team. By taking a smart approach to balancing carbs with insulin and exercise, you can love your food and stay healthy.

**Medically reviewed by:** Cheryl Patterson, RD, LDN, CDCES

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