

What Is Carbohydrate Counting?

There are 20.8 million people in the United States, or 7 % of the population, who have diabetes. While an estimated 14.6 million have been diagnosed with diabetes, unfortunately, 6.2 million people (or nearly one-third) are unaware that they have the disease. (1)

With these statistics you probably know someone such as family member, friend, a coworker or yourself who has been diagnosis with diabetes or have had it for a very long time. It is important to learn about what is diabetes and how you can lower the risk. One way to lower your risk of diabetes is learn how to eat right. Carbohydrate counting is the way to plan what and how to eat.

It helps you eat similar amounts of carbohydrate at your meals and snacks. This helps keep your blood glucose close to normal. Eating meals and snack at similar times also helps. The sure way to eat the right amount of foods is to measure food using measuring cups, spoons and food scale.

When you eat food with carbohydrate, the carbohydrate turns into glucose (sugar). Insulin (either the insulin you make or the insulin you take by injection) helps your body use the glucose from food as its main energy source.

Food with Carbohydrate –

Bread, cereal, pasta and grains

Rice, beans and starchy vegetables (potatoes, corn and peas)

Fruit and fruit juice

Milk, yogurt and other dairy foods

Sugary foods (gumdrops, regular soda and fruit drinks)

Sweets (cake, cookies and candy)

What is a Serving?

The magic number is 15 for counting carbohydrate because 15 grams of carbohydrate =

1 carbohydrate or serving, which is:

1 serving of fruit group,

1 serving of starch group,

1 serving of milk group,

1 serving of sweets group

First you must look at the label Nutrition Facts. Look at the serving size this tells you how much is 1 serving of this product. Then look at the grams of total carbohydrates. Don't pay special attention to the grams of sugars. They are already counted as part of the total carbohydrate.

Example: Corn Flakes

Serving Size = $\frac{3}{4}$ cup

Total Carbohydrate = 16 grams

Take 16 and divide it into 15 grams = 1 serving starch

1 carbohydrate choice (1 serving) Use the magic number 15

2 carbohydrate choice (2 serving) Use 2 times the magic number 15

3 carbohydrate choice (3 serving) Use 3 times the magic number 15

Ex: $\frac{1}{2}$ cup Pasta = 15 gms/1 choice

1 cup Pasta = 30 gms/2 choice

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup Pasta = 45 gms/ 3 choice

You can include these in your meal plan by swapping one serving of other carbohydrate foods. Carbohydrate counting is simply adding up the amount of carbohydrate in the foods you eat each day.

Spreading them throughout the day helps prevent high blood sugar after meals.

You do not have to count the protein (meats) and fats in meal plan.

These foods have very little carbohydrate and do not raise blood sugar levels as high. Be careful of not consuming too many fats and protein. These can cause other health problems such as heart disease, cancer, weight gain and possible kidney problems.

Taking care of your diabetes and eating well doesn't have to be complicated. Remember, there is no such thing as a diabetic diet. It is important to learn everything you can about diabetes especially

nutrition. If you have any further questions it is good to ask your dietitian to show you how to limit your carbohydrate grams and what meal plan is best for you.

- (1) National Diabetes Fact Sheet, 2005, Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2005.

- (2) American Diabetes Association Diabetes A to Z: What You Need to Know About Diabetes – Simply Put 4th edition 2000.

- (3) Carbohydrate Counting – Children with Diabetes – The Online Community for Kids, Families and Adults with Diabetes – Volume 12, Number 34

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