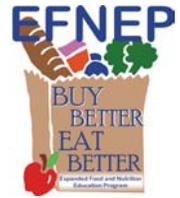




Family Nutrition In Action

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CARBOHYDRATES

Carbs, (short for carbohydrates) is now a very popular word. You hear about low-carb diets on TV and radio. Low-carb products are in the grocery store. Low-carb meals are sold in fast food restaurants. Yet, many of the foods we need such as grains, fruits, and vegetables are rich in carbohydrate. It's no surprise that most of us are confused about choosing and eating carbohydrate-type foods.

We Need Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates are very important because they give us energy for all our activities. Carbohydrates give us energy for walking, running, singing, dancing, thinking, sleeping...

There are two types of carbohydrates: simple carbohydrates and complex carbohydrates.

- Simple carbohydrates give us quick energy. They are usually sweet tasting items such as candy, soda, and fruit. They are sweet because sugar is a simple carbohydrate and these foods have a lot of sugar in them. When we eat fruit, we are getting vitamins, minerals, and fiber in addition to the sugar. When we eat candy or drink soda, we are just getting the sugar.

- Complex carbohydrates give us energy slowly and over a longer period of time. Examples of complex carbohydrates are vegetables and "starchy" foods like bread, rice, noodles, and potatoes. Complex carbohydrates are also a good source of vitamins, minerals, and fiber.

Carbs and Weight Loss

People gain weight when they eat more food energy than they need. Carbohydrates are a major source of food energy. So, if too much energy makes us fat, will cutting out carbs make us thin?

It might! But it's not the best way.

Most people lose weight on a low-carb diet -- at least in the beginning. But most people lose weight on **any** diet -- at least in the beginning. When you are on a diet, you eat less food than you usually do. If you eat less, you will lose weight.

It's a good idea to eat less by eating smaller portions and by cutting down on some of the simple carbohydrates. It's good to drink less soda, eat less candy, and add less sugar to your cereal, or to the foods you prepare.

But other carbohydrate-type foods such as orange juice, milk, cheese, whole grain breads, carrots, or rice and beans, are all part of a healthy diet. By cutting back on these carbohydrate-type foods, you will be losing out on the important vitamins, minerals, and fiber these foods give you. For this reason, a low-carb diet is not recommended for growing children or pregnant women. And adults following a low-carb diet should take a vitamin/mineral supplement.

It is not easy to lose weight. It can be slow and frustrating. Low-carb diets may work faster at first. But in the long run, you may be better off eating smaller portions of meals that include a variety of fresh vegetables, fruits, and grains, and by including some form of daily exercise in your life.

Below is an example of a simple meal that balances carbohydrates with nutrients and energy. Served with a glass

of water and followed by a walk, this could be part of any healthy weight-loss diet.

A Balanced Meal



2-3 ounces chicken

½ - ¾ cup brown rice

½ cup steamed greens

1 small apple with 1 cheese slice



“Low-Carb” Foods

Soon you will be seeing a lot of low-carb foods in the grocery store. But just because an item says that it is low-carb doesn't really mean that it is. There is not yet a true meaning for “low-carb”. For example, “low-carb” bread may have half the carbohydrates of regular bread or it may have just a little bit less carbohydrate than regular bread. But in any case, if an item says “low-carb”, it will probably cost more.

For additional information, contact your local County Extension Office:



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