

Carbohydrate Confusion

Diabetes is on the rise. As well, there are many that are 'border line' diabetic and their doctor may be telling them that they need to clean up their diet to prevent them from becoming a diabetic. It isn't just those that are in this dire situation that need to pay attention to diet. Everyone should have a general understanding of the processes that are involved with this and learn healthy eating to not only prevent disease, but to promote good health.

Everyone has heard about 'carbohydrates' but there is a wealth of misinformation out there. Let's learn a bit about carbohydrates and then we can understand further how the body deals with them. Carbs are our primary source of energy, as well:

- They are protein sparing. This means that they will be used for energy before other sources of energy (like muscle). This is important for those that are reducing calories in an effort to lose weight.
- Simple carbohydrates are short chain sugars.
- Complex carbohydrates are long chain sugars.
- All carbohydrates are sugar.
- All carbohydrates illicit an insulin response in order to lower blood sugar.
- Different carbohydrates digest at different rates.
- All carbohydrates are approximately 4 calories per gram.

Your body is a wonderful machine; if you ingest any kind of food, the body goes through a series of processes to break down this food. In particular, when you ingest carbohydrates in any form, the body releases insulin to counter the blood sugar rise that is a result of the carbohydrate meal. Insulin is a powerful hormone that can be manipulated for optimum benefit. It enables the body to use the ingested carbohydrates in three ways: as an immediate energy source, to be stored as muscle glycogen or to be stored as body fat. Insulin is fat sparing; this means that if there is an abundance of insulin, the body is stimulated to store more body fat. It makes sense then to avoid insulin spikes. How is this done?

You will want to avoid the rollercoaster of blood sugar spikes and valleys of low blood sugar. Advertisers try to entice you to eat a chocolate bar to help those mid-afternoon slumps. The result of this indulgence is a blood sugar spike (slightly more energy or alertness), followed by a surge of insulin (a slump in energy, lethargy, sleepiness). Then you will desire either more sugar or caffeine as a 'pick-me-up' to get through to supper. Sound familiar?

To avoid this, you will want to consume more complex carbohydrates, and avoid simple carbohydrates, or sugary foods. One of the most effective ways to lower insulin response is to eat protein or healthy fat with any carbohydrates ingested. Small meals five or six times a day are another effective tool to moderate the insulin release and control appetite. It's so much easier to resist tempting foods when you aren't hungry. Try to eat every 2-3 hours, before you are ravenous. Then choose whole grains, lean proteins and plenty of fruits and vegetables.

Most people KNOW what they should be eating; it's the consistent application of sound eating principles that throw us off. By being proactive with your health and you can avoid many of the ailments that abound. A little education will go a long way to keep you lean, healthy and disease free.

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Shawna is shaking up the fitness routines of several people in her Adventure Boot Camps. For more information, please visit her website.