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Carbohydrates: Why Size Matters

By Laura Turner

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by: **Laura Turner**

If I collected a dime for each time I've seen or heard the word "carbohydrate" – or picked up a book on the subject, for that matter – I'd be a wealthy woman. And of course we've all heard the buzzwords: simple carb; complex carb; high carb; low carb; no carb. But do we really know what a carbohydrate is? And are carbs really as bad and fattening as we're told they are?

In this article, I'll make my best attempt to unveil the mystery of the carbohydrate – and why it's gotten such a bad rap. After all, it's the molecule both scientists and nutritionists know is the main source of the body's energy.

BASIC CHEMISTRY:

First the boring stuff. The basic chemistry of a carbohydrate. I'll keep it brief: Carbohydrates contain a carbon atom attached to water molecules. This is important because it's the structure and size of a carbohydrate which influences the speed by which it's converted into glucose (sugar) and then into energy.

WHY ARE CARBS USEFUL?

Before we take a look at the different "sizes" of carbohydrates, let's look at why they are useful to us. Aside from supplying the body's energy, carbs are also useful for the proper functioning of internal organs, as well as proper function of the muscles and nervous system.

The most exciting feature of a carbohydrate, in this writer's opinion, however, is it's ability to aid in protein and fat metabolism. So as it turns out, when used wisely, carbohydrates are actually useful in burning fat. **THE THREE PRINCIPAL CARBS FOUND IN FOODS:**

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Next let's take a look at the three basic carbohydrates found in foods (Still boring but stay with me). They are: simple sugars, starches and fiber.

Simple Sugars come in two varieties. The monosaccharide (meaning one sugar) are quickly digested and almost immediately utilized by the body due to their "simple" structure (think fruits, fruit juices and honey). The second, disaccharides, act in almost the same way and are one molecule larger. The disaccharides, however, tend to be more of the refined sugars are very sweet to taste (think white sugar, candy etc.)

The second basic type of carb is the starches or what we would consider complex carbs (the polysaccharides): foods such as potatoes, wheat, rice, corn. These carbs are slow to break down and take some time to be converted into energy. Finally, there's the fibers (think bran). Fibers don't have a lot of energetic value, however, they do lend some support to the body. Because they don't add much sugar to the system, they make it further through the pipeline to help with intestinal function and elimination. Moreover, they reduce cholesterol and slow fat absorption. **WHY SIZE MATTERS**

The theory behind low carbohydrate diets is, when the body consumes too many carbohydrates the excess will become stored by the body as fat. This is true.

When the body ingests a carbohydrate, it aims to convert it to glucose as soon as it can, so that it can be utilized by the body. If there is some excess, no problem, it will get stored as glycogen in the limited space of the muscles. The trouble arises, when the stores exceeded capacity: the remaining molecules are stored as fat in fat cells that can infinitely expand (horrors!).

Yet, what if there was a way to outsmart this system by using the different "sizes" of carbohydrate molecules to your advantage? What if you could keep the body burning carbs at a steady rate according to the speed of your metabolism and your activity level?

Enter the glycemic index. The glycemic index is a scale which tells you (on a food-by-food basis) the rate at which a carbohydrate is converted into glucose. The scale is calibrated by glucose itself (which is rated at 100). The higher the number the faster the conversion.

First used by diabetics to prevent flux in blood sugar, the glycemic index (GI) has become a popular way to get all the benefits of carbohydrates without the threat of fat storage.

Here's what the scale looks like:

Low GI = 55 or less

Medium GI = 56 – 69

High GI = 70 or more

To see a chart with samples of some favorite foods visit:

HOW IS THE GI HELPFUL?

If weight loss or weight maintenance is your goal (isn't it everyone's?), creating a diet around lower GI foods will decrease peaks in glucose levels. It's as simple as that.

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You can implement this eating pattern by scanning the low glycemic foods and aiming to consume a serving at each meal (Be sure to see the article on food combining in this issue). This will also help you avoid both the "highs and lows" of the refined sugar rush.

Higher glycemic foods can be useful, too, and are considered the "recovery" foods. Medium and high GI foods should be consumed for up to two hours after exercise to recover lost carbohydrates and maintain steady blood–sugar levels.

Because metabolism varies from person to person, it would be well worth your time and effort to continue a personal study of the glycemic index. Enjoy your carbs by checking in on your favorite foods and decide when it's best to consume them.

Where to get this information: You can get the skinny on the glycemic indexes of all your favorite carbohydrate foods. Check out the searchable data base at: www.glycemicindex.com

In closing, here's a few guidelines to help you put your carbs to good use:

Aim to eat several small meals during the day. Choose one serving of carbs for each, preferably low

GI.

When in doubt choose carbohydrates that are naturally occurring such as vegetables and fruits.

Minimize refined sugars whenever possible.

When consuming breads aim for wheat instead of white.

Try to substitute white potatoes with sweet and substitute brown rice for white.

Laura Turner is the Sr. Editor of The New Body News and Wellness Letter: The premier online eZine dedicated to giving you the 'Insight and Inspiration to Build a Better You.' Raise your healthy I.Q. Subscribe today for F.r.e.e. visit:

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By Raymond

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Carbohydrates are the bodies source of fuel when we use energy.

Similiart to a car or lawnmower when they use fuel.

You might wonder how this is possible well carbohydrates consist of sugar and starch.

And foods that consist of of these elements give the body a rush of energy.

For example foods like breads and grains would be considered carbohydrates.

But you might wonder well what happens when we don't use all the fuel that these carbohydrates provide for us.

Well the body converts it into glycogen which stays stored in the liver and muscles.

Which is not always a good thing because then your body can create fat!

This happens when you can't store anymore glycogen in the body because your body is creating to much glucose!

This means you should balance the amount of carbohydrates you take in and probably do more exercise.

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