

Carbohydrates by Color

Carbohydrates are your body's main source of energy

Carbohydrates (carbs) come from sugars, starches, and dietary fiber. They are part of a healthy diet. For most people, carbs are the body's leading energy source and affect blood sugar.

How many and what carbs you eat affects how high and quickly your blood sugar rises.

To keep it simple, you can use colors—colorful, brown, and white—to identify carbs. Some carbs are healthier than others. Carbs with deeper or brighter colors are usually more nutritious than paler, more processed carbs, such as foods made with white flour and sugar.

Colorful Carbs

Starchy Vegetables

Starchy vegetables add color and texture to meals. They are healthy substitutes for highly processed grains, such as white flour and white rice. Native people traditionally ate a wide variety of corn, beans, squash, and root vegetables.

These vegetables are naturally high in fiber and nutrients. They raise blood sugar more slowly than the more processed carbohydrates.

Try to eat at least 5 cups of starchy vegetables every week.

Fruit

Fruit is a colorful carbohydrate which is low in fat and calories. The sweetness you taste when eating fruit is from the natural sugar in it. Although fruit has carbohydrates, it is low in fat and calories.

Fruits may be fresh, frozen, canned, or dried. Fruit is a good source of nutrients: potassium, folate, vitamin C, and fiber.

Try to eat 2 to 3 servings of fruit each day—such as a cup of berries and a small apple, or 2 tablespoons of raisins.



Brown Carbs

Whole Grains

Whole grains are usually brown. They come in many shapes and textures and are a major energy source. Whole grains include whole wheat flour, brown and wild rice, rolled oats, and corn meal. Some breads and pastas are made with whole grain.

Whole grain foods are full of fiber and raise sugar more slowly than processed grains. They are less likely to cause spikes in blood sugar.

Make half your grain choices whole grains.



White Carbs

Processed Grains and Sugars

Processed grains and sugar are usually white. Foods made from these tend to raise blood sugar quickly and could contribute to it going too high.

Food made with white flour includes crackers, white bread, flour tortillas, fry bread, and instant noodles.

Choose white carbs less often.



Dairy Foods

Dairy foods are rich in essential nutrients: calcium, phosphorus, vitamin D, and protein. Many dairy foods have carbs along with protein and fat. They can be part of a healthy diet.

Aim for 3 servings of dairy foods each day



Low Carbs or No Carbs

Foods with low or no carbs have very limited or no effect on blood sugar levels. Some foods with few or no carbs include:

- Meats, fish, eggs, and cheese
- Non-starchy vegetables, such as tomatoes, onions, green beans, carrots, cabbage, celery, lettuce, and peppers

Put into practice what you've learned:

See [Find the Carbohydrates on My Native Plate](#).