Choosing healthy foods: carbohydrates
GetNHealthy with Aetna℠

Carbohydrates, also called starches, are one of the basic food groups your body needs for good health. Carbohydrates are your body’s primary energy source, and it’s important to eat carbohydrates every day. The trick is to choose the right types of carbohydrates and to eat the right amount.

All carbohydrates are made up of sugar, but different types of carbohydrates have different shapes and structures.

There are three main types of carbohydrates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
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| Complex carbohydrates | These foods generally do not taste sweet. The sugars are connected together and are surrounded by a suitcase-like structure called fiber. Fiber plays an important role in keeping your body healthy. For example, fiber will help keep you feeling satisfied longer, and it also helps the food you eat move through your digestive system. | 100% whole-grain bread  
Brown rice  
Steel-cut oats  
Quinoa  
Corn  
Whole-grain crackers  
Other examples:  
“Starchy” veggies (like sweet potatoes)  
Legumes (like peas) |
| Refined carbohydrates | These are foods that do not taste sweet but they quickly turn into sugar in your body. “Refined” means that the suitcase, or fiber, has been taken away. | White bread  
White rice  
Biscuits  
Crackers |
| Simple sugars         | These foods taste sweet in your mouth. These foods should only be eaten occasionally.           | Cake, cookies, candy, ice cream and drinks like juice, regular soda and sports drinks       |
Try to choose complex carbohydrates instead of refined carbohydrates or simple sugars. Try to avoid having carbohydrates by themselves. Instead, eat carbohydrates with a source of protein or healthy fat to slow the digestion of sugars. For example, have your whole-grain waffle with some peanut butter in the morning.

**Question 1:** Which one of the following is a complex carbohydrate?
A. White bread  
B. Whole-grain bread  
C. White rice

**Question 2:** Which one of the following is an unhealthy combination?
A. Whole-wheat pita bread and hummus  
B. Whole-grain crackers and cheese  
C. Pasta and garlic bread  
D. Baked tortilla chips and guacamole

**Activity 1:** Circle all of the carbohydrates in the food lists below. Connect a protein source with a carbohydrate to make a healthy combination. There are many different possible combinations.

Peanut butter  Cereal or muesli  
Toast  100% whole-grain wrap  
Egg  Whole-wheat crackers  
Turkey  Cheese  
English muffin  Tuna  
Yogurt  Waffle

**Activity 2:** List the protein and carbohydrate combinations you made in Activity 1.
1. Yogurt and cereal or muesli  
2.  
3.  
4.  
5.  
6. 

**Answer key:**
Question 1 — B. Whole-grain bread  
Question 2 — C. Pasta and garlic bread  
Activities 1 and 2 — Carbohydrates include toast, English muffin, cereal or muesli, whole-wheat crackers, waffle and 100% whole-grain wrap. Proteins include peanut butter, yogurt, turkey, cheese, tuna and egg. There are many different possible combinations. Make sure you matched one item from the protein group with one item from the carbohydrate group.

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