

# CARBOHYDRATES

You've probably seen ads for low-carb foods and diets, but kids and adults need carbohydrates. Most foods contain carbohydrates, which the body breaks down into simple sugars - the major source of energy for the body. There are two major types of carbohydrates in foods: simple and complex.

**Simple carbohydrates:** These are also called simple sugars. Simple sugars are found in refined sugars, like the white sugar you'd find in a sugar bowl. If you have a lollipop, you're eating simple carbohydrates. But you'll also find simple sugars in more nutritious foods, such as fruit and milk. It's better to get your simple sugars from food like fruit and milk. Why? Because they contain vitamins, fiber, and important nutrients like calcium. A lollipop does not.

**Complex carbohydrates:** Complex Carbohydrates include grain products, such as bread, crackers, pasta, and rice. As with simple sugars, some complex carbohydrate foods are better choices than others. Refined grains, such as white flour and white rice, have been processed, which removes nutrients and fiber. But unrefined grains still contain these vitamins and minerals. Unrefined grains also are rich in fiber, which helps your digestive system work well. Fiber helps you feel full, so you are less likely to overeat these foods. That explains why a bowl of oatmeal fills you up better than sugary candy that has the same amount of calories as the oatmeal.

## **How the Body Uses Carbohydrates**

When you eat carbohydrates, the body breaks them down into simple sugars. These sugars are absorbed into the bloodstream. As the sugar level rises in your body, the pancreas releases a hormone called insulin. Insulin is needed to move sugar from the blood into the cells, where the sugar can be used as a source of energy. When this process goes fast - as with simple sugars - you're more likely to feel hungry again soon. When it occurs more slowly, as with a whole-grain food, you'll be satisfied longer. These types of complex carbohydrates give you energy over a longer period of time.

The carbohydrates in some foods (mostly those that contain a lot of simple sugars) cause the blood sugar level to rise more quickly than others. Scientists have been studying whether eating foods that cause big jumps in blood sugar may be related to health problems like [diabetes](#) and [heart disease](#). You're probably already on the right track if you are limiting simple sugars (such as candy) and eating more complex carbohydrates (like vegetables, oatmeal, and whole-grain wheat bread).