

Why Carbohydrates are Good for You!

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Believe it or not, despite the fact that there are many diets, which preach low-carb eating as the golden ticket to weight loss, the truth is that your body actually needs carbohydrates to function at its optimal level. Carbohydrates are a component of foods such as breads, grains, cereals, fruits, and vegetables that break down into glucose. It is this glucose, which directly feeds your muscles and cells allowing you to sustain an active life-style.

An important fact to know is how many carbohydrates your body needs to function at its peak level. If you are diabetic for example, you may need to take extra care in how you spread your carbs throughout the day or at any one time. This is to prevent drastic peaks and valleys in your blood sugars. Contrastingly, if you are a long-distance marathon runner you have a different set of issues to contend with, such as how not to run out of carbohydrate fuel for your muscles on a long 26 mile run.

It is also important to understand that carbs in and of themselves are not evil and do not make you gain weight. To lose weight you must use more calories than you take in through food or drink. Clinical studies have shown that for long-term weight loss, low carbohydrate diets fare no better than traditional diets where 50-60% of calories come from carbs. Therefore, it is not the source of calories that makes the difference in body weight, but rather the total intake of calories.

Additionally, in studies where participants were divided into two groups where one group followed a traditional diet and the other followed a low-carb diet, more of the participants completed the study when consuming a calorie-controlled traditional diet versus the same calorie controlled low-carb diet. The reason may have been due to having fewer restrictions on what they could eat, leading to an easier time of maintaining the diet and thus weight loss!

Another benefit to carbs? Fiber—a portion of the carbohydrate food that your body cannot break down and use for energy. Currently 25-35 grams of fiber are recommended each day. Fiber has been found to decrease incidence of cancer, decrease total cholesterol, and increase sensations of satiety. When a food is in its natural form, there will be more fiber in it.

For example, a piece of whole fruit such as an apple has 3-4 grams of fiber and about 80 calories, a good source. Yet, if you drink 1 cup of apple juice you will only be obtaining the concentrated sugars of the fruit, without the filling fiber, and thus would be drinking about 120 calories and 0 grams of fiber. Therefore, it is important to eat whole fruits and vegetables for wholesome and filling nutrients and fiber.

Finally, you know how when you watch an elite athlete and think about the amazing ways they can use their body and how healthy they look? Well, I promise you they did not get that way by eating a high fat, high protein diet. They would never be able to train as hard as they do day in and day out to become the Olympic athlete they may be! To achieve their goals, their bodies required glucose from carbs to sustain their lengthy and difficult training regimens. Hence, it is important to give your body the right balance of nutrients including carbohydrates to perform at your very best. Happy eating!