

[IMAGE]

Are All Carbs Bad?

By Julie T. Chen, MD

With all the fad diets these days, it's a challenge to know which diets are beneficial and effective and which ones are harmful. Many of my patients ask about carbohydrates and whether they should avoid it altogether. What's interesting is that people frequently forget that fruits and vegetables are carbohydrates as well, so even with diets that avoid 'carbs,' you are still getting carbs through your plant-based foods.

What's important to keep in mind is that we shouldn't eliminate entire food groups at a time. Instead, you should learn to eat smartly within each food group so as to maximize nutritional intake and minimize weight gain and sugar issues.

When you focus on eating whole non-processed grains and vegetables, you are naturally going to be eating healthier and the weight will usually drop off because you have a new healthier eating pattern. "Carbs" like cookies, white breads and pastas, and sweets are destructive to your body and to your weight loss efforts.

carbs - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark So, the way to focus on eating a well-balanced diet is to make sure that majority of your carbohydrates are coming from your vegetables. If you already have pre-diabetes or diabetes, I usually recommend to my patients with these issues to stay with vegetables more and avoid too many fruits since they are higher in the sugar load. When there are high sugar load foods, or high glycemic index foods, the increased sugar load on the body is more inflammatory and harmful to cellular functioning than those foods that are broken down slowly and a steady stream of fuel to the body is released.

Our body responds well to a diet that is mostly plant-based with healthy fats and lean protein and low in sugar. The key image I usually recommend to my patients is to make sure that at least half of your plate is full of vegetables and another quarter of the plate is from lean proteins and healthy fats like avocados, nuts, or fish, and the last quarter of the plate is filled with whole unprocessed grains like quinoa, barley, oats, and brown rice, just to name a few.

The reason why I don't recommend a diet completely devoid of carbohydrates is because there are many health benefits included in a diet that consists of whole grains and vegetables. A diet devoid of these is

usually devoid of vitamins, minerals, phytonutrients, and anti-oxidants. All of these are essential to regular cellular functioning.

So, when you are looking to fine-tune your diet, look towards eating a diet that is high in plants, healthy fats, lean proteins, and whole unprocessed grains in the proportions I mentioned in this article. The next time you are with friends and they are looking to streamline their diet as well, the key points to pass along are:

1. Eat mostly a plant-based diet
 2. Avoid refined sugars and carbohydrates
 3. Whole grains and vegetables should be the foundation of your carbohydrate intake
 4. Make sure to include healthy fats and lean proteins in your daily diet
 5. Avoiding major food groups is never a good idea in any diet that is meant to improve your health
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