

# “I am confused about carbohydrates. Should I include them in my diet?”

**Carbohydrates are an essential component of your diet because they provide many of the vitamins, minerals and fiber you need for good health.**

## What is a carbohydrate?

- A carbohydrate is a food source that breaks down into glucose. Your body uses the glucose for energy. Carbohydrates include sugars, starches and fiber.
- Your body can use glucose immediately or store it in your liver and muscles.
- If you eat too much of any food—even healthy foods—your body will store the excess as fat. To maintain a healthy weight, it's important to be aware of how many calories you take in and how many calories you burn each day.

## Simple carbohydrates

- These are made up of one or two sugar molecules, and your body absorbs them rapidly. Simple carbohydrates are found in nutritious foods, as well as in foods that are not so good for you.
- Examples of nutritious foods with simple carbohydrates: fruits, milk, milk products and vegetables.
- Examples of foods with simple carbohydrates that are not so nutritious: sugar, syrup, honey, jelly, soda, candy, juice, cookies, and white bread or pasta. Many of these foods are refined or processed. The nutrients and fiber are taken away and replaced with fat, sugar and salt.
- Consuming too many simple carbohydrates from processed or refined foods can lead to fatigue, weight gain, and increased risk of disease such as diabetes and obesity.

## Complex carbohydrates

- These are made up of three or more sugar molecules, and your body absorbs them slowly.
- Complex carbohydrates are foods in their whole or natural state, not processed. Examples are whole grain pasta, brown rice, whole oats, whole wheat bread, starchy vegetables (sweet potatoes, pumpkin, corn) and legumes (beans, lentils, peas).
- The recommended number of daily calories from carbohydrates varies from person to person. Some factors include activity level, health condition, height and weight.
- Complex carbohydrates keep you fuller longer, promote healthy digestion, and contain essential vitamins and minerals.
- These carbohydrates take longer to break down before releasing glucose into your body, which leads to sustained energy, stable moods and controlled appetites.

It is important to choose your carbohydrates wisely, as it is with all foods. Always consult your doctor when changing your nutrition plan significantly.

