

The basics of “Carb Counting”

Who is this handout for?

This handout is for patients with type 2 diabetes and their family and/or caregivers who wish to learn more about how managing carbohydrates, or “carbs” from foods can help improve diabetes.

What are carbs?

Carbohydrates or “carbs” are found in many foods:

- Starches (breads, cereals)
- Starchy vegetables
- Dairy (milk, yogurt, ice cream)
- Sugary foods
- Sugar free foods
- Fat free foods

What is Carb Counting?

“Carb counting” is a meal-planning method, aimed at keeping blood sugar, or glucose, levels stable. Keeping blood sugar levels low and stable will reduce the risk of diabetes complications. When digested, carbohydrates cause blood glucose levels to rise. Knowing which foods are carbohydrates is important to be successful in carb counting.

What Carb Counting is NOT:

- Carb counting is not a no-carb diet. Instead it is about choosing the right TYPE and AMOUNT of carbs
- Carb counting is not about replacing your usual foods for sugar free or fat free products

Can I eat an unlimited amount of sugar free foods?

No. Carb counting looks at TOTAL carbs in a food. There might not be any difference in carbs between the sugar free version and the standard product. In this case it might be ok to let taste and price guide your choice between the two products. This also applies for “no sugar added” products and fat-free foods.



How do I know what amount of carbs is right for me?

The number of carbs you should eat per day depends on your activity level and medications you are on. It is estimated based on your daily calorie needs, activity level and need for weight loss. The total daily amount is then divided between 3 meals a day, and a snack. You should discuss this exact amount with your healthcare provider.

A good place to start:

- Men: 60 to 75 grams of carbs per meal, with 15 to 30 grams of carbs for a snack
- Women: 45 to 60 grams of carbs per meal, with 15 to 30 grams of carbs for a snack

What are “free” foods?

“Free” foods are foods that won’t increase your blood sugar: Generally free foods contain less than 5 grams of carbs and under 20 calories per serving. Adding these to each of your meals will not count towards your carb counting, but you should limit them to 2 to 3 servings per day. Also choose low fat meats (chicken breast, turkey or fish), mono- and poly-unsaturated fats (olive and canola oils, nuts, olives), and reduced fat dressings.

- Artichokes
- Asparagus
- Bean sprouts
- Beans (green, wax)
- Beets
- Broccoli
- Cabbage
- Carrots
- Cauliflower
- Celery
- Cucumbers
- Mushrooms
- Peppers
- Salad greens
- Tomatoes
- Zucchini

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How do I start carb counting?

Step 1. Learn how to read food labels

Food labels indicate the amount of carbohydrates in each SERVING. If you eat more (or less) than one serving, make sure to adjust the amount of carbs. It is important to read TOTAL carbohydrates, which includes fiber, sugar and sugar alcohol. Choose foods high in fiber. Fiber helps slow down the rise in blood sugar after eating those foods.

Nutrition Facts		
Serving Size: About (20g)		
Servings Per Container: 16		
	Amount Per Serving	% Daily Value*
Total Calories	60	
Calories From Fat	15	
Total Fat	2 g	3%
Saturated Fat	1 g	4%
Trans Fat	0 g	
Cholesterol	0 mg	0%
Sodium	45 mg	2%
Total Carbohydrates	15 g	5%
Dietary Fiber	4 g	17%
Sugars	4 g	
Sugar Alcohols (Polyols)	3 g	
Protein	2 g	
Vitamin A		0%
Vitamin C		0%
Calcium		2%
Iron		2%

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet.

Ingredients: Wheat flour, unsweetened chocolate, erythritol, inulin, oat flour, cocoa powder, evaporated cane juice, whey protein concentrate, corn starch (low glycemic), natural flavors, salt, baking soda, wheat gluten, guar gum

Step 2. Prepare your kitchen for success

It is best to accurately measure your portion sizes. You may be surprised by what actual serving sizes look like! These tools will help you stay on track:

- Measuring cups
- Food scale (prices start at \$20)
- Calculator
- A journal (or use a smart phone app) to record your meals and snacks. This is helpful to track your meals and for having conversations with your healthcare provider
- Book or website for non-packaged foods (<http://ndb.nal.usda.gov/ndb/search/list>)

Step 3. Be consistent

When determining your daily amount of carbs, they should be divided into 3 meals spaced 4 to 6 hours apart, and 1 snack. You may find this is easier to manage if you pre-plan your meals. You do not have to eat the same food each day, but you should try to eat the same amount of carbs.

Step 4. Check-in with your healthcare provider

Keep a log of everything you eat and drink. This will help you and your provider decide if your total daily carbs is appropriate for managing your diabetes.

Where can I find more information?

Ask your doctor or healthcare provider to help you meet with a Certified Diabetes Educator or member of your primary care provider’s Community Health Team. They will have lots of resources to help you manage your diet.

Trustworthy websites

- American Diabetes Association (ADA) www.diabetes.org
- Centers for Disease Control (CDC) www.cdc.gov/diabetes/
- National Diabetes Education Program www.ndep.nih.gov

Example Free Smart Phone Apps

- **Diabetes in Check: Coach, Blood Glucose & Carb Tracker** In Check:
- **Fooducate**
- **Glucosio**
- **Health2Sync**