






Carbs: Choosing the Best Ones

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UNHEALTHY CARBS - Fairly Obvious

Eating healthy carbs (in moderation) can be a challenge when society promotes so many unhealthy options! These foods provide plenty of calories but almost no nutrition value. Also known as “empty calories”.

Instant Oatmeal and Sugary Cereals	Doughnuts, Muffins, Jelly/Cinnamon Rolls	Value Meal (Burger, fries, drink)	Candy Bars, Snack Cakes & Quick Treats	Potato Chips & Crackers
				

UNHEALTHY CARBS - Sneaky/Less Obvious

Even options that SEEM healthy, can also be a problem due to excess calories and unfavorable responses in blood sugar. Most of these are lacking in nutrition value as well, at least relative to the calorie cost.

Pasta, Spaghetti, Ravioli, Lasagna	Rice Cakes, Chex Mix, Pretzels	Dried Fruit and Trail Mix + Candy	Sugary Yogurt	Granola Bars, Cereal Bars	Fruit Smoothies Coffee Concoctions
					

CARBS ARE EVERYWHERE!

- Bread and wheat products** - loaf bread, dinner rolls, biscuits, pizza crust, breading on any food, flour
- Cereal grains** - breakfast cereal (even if it says “Heart Healthy”), oats, rice (white, brown, wild), quinoa
- Spaghetti, pasta, macaroni, noodles** of all kinds
- Corn and corn products** - whole kernel corn, corn on the cob, grits, tortillas, cornbread, popcorn
- Potatoes** - all potatoes are high in carbs, including baking and sweet potatoes; French fries too
- Starchy vegetables** are highest, but all vegetables contain some; it’s a spectrum
- Legumes of all kinds**, including black beans, baked beans, pintos, limas, chickpeas, lentils, hummus
- Fruit, fruit juice and dried fruit** - fruit contains valuable nutrients, but it’s also high in carbs/sugars
- Sugar and all caloric sweeteners** - table sugar, brown sugar, honey, molasses, coconut sugar, etc.
- Some dairy products**, including milk (whole, 2%, 1%, skim), chocolate milk, most yogurt
- Treats made from any of the above ingredients** (ice cream, pie, cake, candy, cookies, cinnamon rolls)
- Protein bars and cereal bars**; protein shakes too, but some are better than others
- Common snack foods** like popcorn, potato chips, peanut butter crackers, most processed items
- Beverages containing sugar** - sweet tea, sodas, some coffee creamers, juice, green smoothies
- Condiments** - Ketchup, barbeque sauce, “special sauces” at restaurants, salad dressing, pickle relish

You don't have to eat zero carbs...but it's best to cut back on a lot of them, especially the highly processed ones. Which ones are you willing to cut back on? Could you change what you eat for breakfast? Are you snacking on highly processed options that provide minimal nutrition? Maybe you can find some "carb swaps" that make sense (see last page). The charts and other information in this handout can help you compare and make a better decision about what to keep and what to replace.

TOP REASONS FOR LIMITING CARBS	CARB GOALS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Blood sugar management <input type="checkbox"/> Weight loss <input type="checkbox"/> To reduce insulin <input type="checkbox"/> Less inflammation <input type="checkbox"/> To improve diet quality 	<p>Most people will find weight management easiest by keeping carbs less than 100 grams per day.</p> <hr/> <p>Your personal sweet spot might be less: 50-75 grams/day or even as low as 25 grams/day.</p>

Please see **GALORIE AND MACRO TARGETS** for a closer look at how many carbs to include in your plan.

A QUICK SUMMARY OF WHAT WE ARE LOOKING FOR:

CARBS TO CHOOSE	CARBS TO AVOID or EAT LESS OF
Minimally processed	Highly processed/ultra-processed
Ones with valuable nutrients	Ones with empty calories
Ones with naturally occurring fiber -that are more slowly digested	Ones that are quickly digested -flaked, puffed, juiced, overly cooked, etc.
These foods are usually found on the perimeter of the grocery or at Farmers Markets	Often found in boxes, containers, individually wrapped items; the interior of the grocery; fast food
Examples: Non-starchy vegetables, starchy vegetables (in moderation), whole fruits (especially berries), low-sugar Greek yogurt, nuts and seeds, beans/legumes, maybe oatmeal	Examples: bread, biscuits, bagels, grits, cereal, rice, spaghetti/pasta, crackers, potato chips, treats (cake, pie, danishes, ice cream, candy), sugary beverages, dried fruit, juice, fast/quick food

Rule of Thumb: *If you have to cook/prepare it; if it takes time to chew it; if you need to sit down to eat it - it's probably good! If you can walk around with it, easily stash it in your pocket or purse and/or eat it while driving down the road - it's probably not so good. Whole, real food isn't usually very "handy". But that's ok! We SHOULD sit down to eat - as a MEAL- and not walk around snacking!*

A WORD ABOUT FIBER

Fiber comes in 2 forms: **soluble** and **insoluble**. Both forms may provide benefits. The BEST sources **naturally** occur in vegetables, legumes, fruits and minimally processed whole-grain foods. However, you may find some processed foods that have fiber added to them that can also be enjoyed as part of a healthy plan.

Check off the reasons you may want to include more fiber in your diet:

- Improved bowel movements/bowel pattern (fiber helps for some people but actually worsens constipation for others; experiment to see whether it helps with your situation)
- Improved gut bacteria (fiber is their “food”)
- Improved blood sugar (fiber slows the absorption of sugar)
- Helps with satiety (makes you feel more “full”)

WHAT ABOUT “NET CARBS”?

NET CARBS = TOTAL CARBS - FIBER - 1/2 SUGAR ALCOHOLS (if present)

- Best when used with **healthy** WHOLE FOOD carb choices.
- Manufacturers manipulate net carb numbers, often by adding fiber to the food and then subtracting it, along with sugar alcohols. This makes processed foods look appealing/acceptable to those following lower carb plans.
- For **veggies and whole foods**, it’s ok to subtract **all** the fiber. There won’t be sugar alcohols in these foods so you don’t have to worry about that!
- For **processed foods**, it is BEST to subtract only 1/2 the total fiber and 1/2 the total sugar alcohols.
- The main reason to use a “net carb” number is an attempt to predict the impact of the food on our blood sugar—so we don’t want to **underestimate** the carb amount.
- For more information, check out this Healthline Article: [How to Calculate Net Carbs](#)

EXAMPLE OF READING A LABEL FOR NET CARBS

- Look at **Total Carbohydrate** first. This is the TOTAL amount of carbs per serving.
- **Dietary Fiber** and **Sugars** are both indented (beneath total carbs). These make up part of the total carbs (not in addition to the total).
- In this example (right), one serving of this food contains 27 grams of carbohydrate. Sugars make up 14 grams of the 27. Fiber makes up 3 grams of the total. There’s no sugar alcohols to worry about in this example.
- **Net carbs would be 27 - 3 = 24.**

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 medium 7" to 7-7/8" long 118g (118 g)	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 105	Calories from Fat 3
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 0g	1%
Saturated Fat 0g	1%
Trans Fat	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 1mg	0%
Total Carbohydrate 27g	9%
Dietary Fiber 3g	12%
Sugars 14g	
Protein 1g	

LEARN TO READ LABELS ON PROCESSED FOODS

SUGAR: A WORD THAT GETS DISGUISED ON LABELS

MANY words on a food label mean “sugar” (see pic, right).

- ❑ Check the ingredients list to look for all the different forms of sugar your food may contain.
- ❑ **To eat less sugar, choose WHOLE FOODS with LESS INGREDIENTS.**

WHAT ARE “NATURAL FLAVORS”?

Have you seen the word “natural flavors” listed as an ingredient and wondered what that meant? You may have seen it listed as an ingredient in your carbonated water, diet soda, or any number of other processed foods. To learn more, here is a Healthline article titled “[Natural Flavors: Should You Eat Them?](#)”

BY ANY OTHER NAME... 37 CRYPTIC NAMES FOR SUGAR THAT MIGHT BE FOOLING YOU ON FOOD LABELS

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| 01. AGAVE NECTAR | 21. GLUCOSE (GRAPE SUGAR) |
| 02. BARLEY MALT | 22. GOLDEN SUGAR (<small>LOW FRUCTOSE</small>) |
| 03. BEET SUGAR | 23. HIGH FRUCTOSE CORN SYRUP |
| 04. BLACKSTRAP MOLASSES | 24. MALTODEXTRINE |
| 05. BROWN RICE SYRUP (RICE SYRUP) | 25. MALTOSE (MALT SUGAR) |
| 06. BROWN SUGAR | 26. MAPLE SYRUP |
| 07. CANE JUICE | 27. MOLASSES SYRUP |
| 08. CANE SUGAR | 28. MUSCOVATO SUGAR |
| 09. CARAMEL | 29. ORGANIC RAW SUGAR |
| 10. CAROB SYRUP | 30. PANELA |
| 11. CASTER SUGAR (SUPERFINE SUGAR) | 31. CONFECTIONER'S SUGAR |
| 12. CORN SYRUP | 32. RICE SYRUP |
| 13. CORN SYRUP SOLIDS (DEXTRROSE) | 33. SORGHUM |
| 14. CRYSTALLINE FRUCTOSE | 34. SUCROSE |
| 15. DEMERARA | 35. TRECLE |
| 16. DIASTATIC MALT (DIASTASE) | 36. TURBINADO |
| 17. ETHYL MALTOL | 37. YELLOW SUGAR |
| 18. FRUCTOSE | |
| 19. FRUIT JUICE CONCENTRATES | |
| 20. GALACTOSE | |



For the complete breakdown, visit our website at www.SuperFoodsRx.com.

LOOK OUT FOR HIDDEN CARBS AND SUGARS

COFFEE/TEA

Black coffee and tea are best, but many people like to add SOMETHING to make them creamier and/or sweeter. See [BEST CHOICES FOR BEVERAGES](#) for the best options.

PROTEIN SHAKES

Your protein shake may also be high in carbs and sugars. Refer to [PROTEIN SHAKES](#) for help selecting ones that are low in carbs, high in protein and that use preferred sugar substitutes.

SUGAR-FREE BEVERAGES

It's tempting to replace all your sugary beverages with options that say “sugar free” and “zero calories”. However, some of these items may be using chemical-based sugar substitutes that are unhealthy. Refer to [BEST CHOICES FOR BEVERAGES](#) and [SUGAR AND SUGAR SUBSTITUTES](#) for help selecting the best options.

FRUIT/JUICE/DRIED FRUIT

This one catches people off guard because we have been encouraged to “eat more fruit and veggies”. Fruit contains sugar, though, and is trouble for many people when trying to lose weight or manage blood sugar. Whole fruit is much better than juice. Dried fruit is like eating candy. See [FRUIT](#) for more info.

ALCOHOL

All forms of alcohol contain calories and most contain some carbs/sugars, but some choices are better than others. Alcohol may or may not be an option for you to include in your diet. If it IS something you choose to include, refer to these two articles from Diet Doctor: “[7 Things You Need to Know About Alcohol and the Keto Diet](#)” and “[Low Carb Alcohol Visual Guide.](#)” Please discuss this option more with your medical team. Also refer to the PDF titled [ALCOHOL](#).

WHAT ELSE MAY BE HIDDEN ON THE LABEL?

➤ **CHEMICALS & OTHER FOOD ADDITIVES**

Preservatives, food dyes and a variety of [food additives](#) (often with names you cannot pronounce) may be found on the ingredients lists of [processed foods](#). Since this is not the case with whole, real food, this is one reason to choose more foods that don't come in packages. For items that DO come in packages, aim for ones that have as few ingredients as possible and that are minimally processed. Buying [organic](#) will at least reduce the amount of some of these. Here's an excellent discussion of this: Zoe Science and Nutrition Podcast - [The Truth About Organic Food](#) (32 minutes).

➤ **GMOs = GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS**

Genetically modified ingredients are found in significant quantities in processed foods. Corn, cotton and soy are the 3 biggest GMO crops. While the intention behind creating genetically altered foods was good, there are potential dangers. [This Healthline article](#) is an excellent resource. Note that organic foods may contain GMO ingredients; only if they say "100% organic" will they be completely free of GMOs.

OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER

➤ **ORGANIC VS CONVENTIONALLY GROWN CROPS**

Organically grown crops may have advantages over conventionally grown. For example, they tend to use natural fertilizers like manure to improve plant growth - and the seeds are non-GMO. There are far [less chemicals](#) in these foods as well. Processed foods with [organic](#) labels have to follow specific labeling laws; these vary depending on whether it is "[100% Organic](#)", "[Organic](#)" or "[Made With Organic Ingredients](#)". Organic foods are usually pricier though. To help differentiate which produce is worth the extra expense, the [Environmental Working Group](#) has a list of the cleanest versus dirtiest produce options. Click these links to learn more: the [DIRTY DOZEN](#) and the [CLEAN FIFTEEN](#).

➤ **GLUTEN/FOOD ALLERGIES/FOOD SENSITIVITY or INTOLERANCE**

Many people have [allergies](#) or [sensitivities](#) to gluten or other ingredients found in processed foods. Processed foods may contain one or more of the offending ingredients. Whether you know that you have an allergy/intolerance or not, you may experience a reaction that results in inflammation and/or other harmful effects. Many people experience reactions to gluten; due to the demand for them, gluten-free processed foods are readily available- but being "gluten-free" doesn't necessarily make it a healthy choice. Fruits and vegetables (in whole form) are naturally gluten-free and can take some of the mystery out of trying to follow a gluten-free diet, as well as dodging many other ingredients. However, there are [anti-nutrients](#) in most plant foods to which people also may react (see below).

➤ **ANTI-NUTRIENTS IN PLANT FOODS**

It may be news to you that many plant foods contain "anti-nutrients". Some of the more common ones include: phytic acid, tannins, lectins, protease inhibitors and calcium oxalate. There is considerable debate in the medical community about the extent to which these may affect us, but they undoubtedly have SOME effect. There are ways to [reduce their impact](#) which includes boiling or cooking appropriately; soaking; and fermenting foods. Some people have found that they feel best when they avoid them altogether as in the "Carnivore Diet" approach; this may also be a reason that a lower carbohydrate plan (which reduces total carbs but also avoids processed foods) can be helpful for many people.

➤ **EFFECT OF CARBS ON BLOOD SUGAR**

Carbohydrates have a much greater effect on blood sugar than proteins and fats. The [glycemic index](#) is a tool that was developed to compare the effect of different [carbohydrate foods](#) on blood sugar. For those trying to improve blood sugar readings, it is often necessary to reduce total carbohydrates and/or aim for foods with a lower glycemic index. Refer to [CALORIE AND MACRO TARGETS](#) to find reasonable goals for calories, carbs, protein and fat. To better understand the effect of specific foods and meals on your blood sugar, consider investing in a fingerstick monitor or a wearable item called a continuous glucose monitor. These can provide feedback that can help you fine tune your plan over time. [This PDF](#) can help you learn more about blood sugar monitoring. Also refer to [BLOOD SUGAR: WAYS TO STABILIZE IT](#) for some additional tips.

➤ **WEIGHT LOSS AND LOWER CARB**

You don't have to go [extremely](#) low-carb or keto to lose weight - but many people find that it does help to reduce carbs at least a little. Cutting back on carbohydrate foods may help for many reasons. It can keep you off a "blood sugar rollercoaster", resulting in more steady energy - which translates into less cravings and better appetite control. Many processed foods are "hyperpalatable" too; once you start eating them you may have trouble stopping. Whole, minimally processed foods - especially ones that contain fiber - have the opposite effect. Processed foods can also be lacking in nutrients, which our bodies actually crave; when you choose foods with more nutrients in them, this can also help you eat less. As you attempt to eat less carbs, it may help to include more [NON-STARCHY VEGGIES](#) in your diet while putting the brakes on some of the [STARCHY FOODS](#).

➤ **CARB SWAPS**

You may want to experiment by swapping out some of your favorite starchy, higher carb foods for some alternatives that still provide flavor but without so many calories and potential to run your blood sugar up. Examples of this are on the following page. Also check out the PDF in the Recipes section called [CARB SWAPS](#).

IN SUMMARY:

- Carbohydrates [can](#) be part of a healthy diet.
- The amount of carbs you tolerate is unique to you. For those who are "[insulin resistant](#)" - you have too much insulin in your body and will need to take measures to reduce insulin in order to lose weight and improve blood pressure, blood cholesterol, etc.
- Consider having blood work done to see what your [fasting insulin level](#) is. This will help you see if you have a problem with too much insulin. You can also use the [Blood Code Assessment Calculator](#) to assess it.
- To lose weight, it's reasonable to shoot for <100 grams per day. Some people may find that <50 grams/day works even better. And some do even better on <20.
- The healthiest carbs are ones that: have desirable nutrients; naturally contain fiber; are minimally processed (with single or few ingredients); and [may](#) be organic. Shop the perimeter of the grocery store to easily find them (fresh produce, frozen veggies).
- Things to look out for with processed carbs: many different sources of sugar (including high fructose corn syrup); sugar substitutes; lack of fiber; "net carb" games that manufacturers play on processed food items.
- This excellent Healthline article titled "[14 Foods to Avoid on Low Carb](#)" serves as an additional summary.

SWAPS TO SAVE CALORIES AND CARBS + DECREASE THE IMPACT OF FOOD ALLERGENS

Read through this list to see which swaps you would like to try! Use the internet to find recipes or click on some of the links included here. Swaps can save you calories, carbs and many of the unhealthy ingredients commonly found in ultra processed foods.

Food or Ingredient	Potential Swap
Bread	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For a sandwich, try making a wrap using lettuce, cabbage or any leafy green. “EXTREME Wellness Wraps” may be used for slightly more carbs than the first option above. Note that these contain wheat, so use as tolerated. And DO NOT get “Mission Carb Balance” wraps; these contain sucralose and food dyes! “Egg White Wraps” may be found near the egg section at the grocery. Not the greatest flavor but could be useful in a casserole to contain some ingredients (like enchiladas). Skip the bun on your burger! Try a bun-less burger instead. Serve with a side of roasted veggies or a side salad. Low-carb bread can be made from almond and coconut flour; “cloud bread” is an example. Other recipes are on the internet. “Cauliflower Sandwich Thins” are another option.
Pizza/Pizza crust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cauliflower crusts can be found in stores or made yourself. Here’s one you can buy. “Fat Head Dough” is an option made from mozzarella cheese and almond flour. It can be used for pizza crust, calzones, etc. Portobello mushrooms make a great base for keto pizza and lasagna. Here’s a pizza recipe, and here’s one for lasagna. You can make low-carb casseroles that highlight the ingredients/flavors in pizza and lasagna. Maria Emmerich swears by her “Protein Noodle Lasagna.” “Cheesy bread” is made from riced broccoli; dip it in lower carb marinara.
Rice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use riced cauliflower or riced broccoli instead; try mixing some Mrs. Dash blends or other seasonings into it after heating it up (lemon pepper flavor goes great with fish; Cajun goes great with shrimp and/or sausage; Italian blends are great with chicken and fish). Try mixing 1 cup riced cauliflower with 1 cup rice to cut the total carbs.
Pasta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use steamed or sauteed cabbage, zucchini spirals, or spaghetti squash. You can buy zucchini spirals in the frozen section; or you can make your own if you have a tool called a “spiralizer”. When using vegetables in place of pasta, be sure to use paper towels to soak up extra water content that is released from the vegetable after cooking; this will prevent your sauce (if using one) from getting watered down.
Crackers or Tortilla Chips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Try cucumber or zucchini slices in place of crackers (eat raw and dip food with it). “Cheese Crisps” can be purchased or baked yourself; great with taco meat!
Potato	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roasted radishes, scalloped turnips, and mashed cauliflower are all options.
Treats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use acceptable sugar substitutes + almond or coconut flour + healthy fats/oils to make improved versions of your favorite treats. Please note that treats (whether they are made with regular flour, oil and sugar or with alternative lower-carb ingredients) are not meant to be eaten daily. They are called “treats” for a reason!

Carb Savings (Examples)

- Swap 1 cup **riced cauliflower** (40 cal, 8 g carb) for 1 cup **white rice** (205 cal, 45 g carb) to **save 165 cal, 37 g carb**.
- Swap 1 cup **spaghetti squash** (42 cal, 10 g carb) for 1 cup **pasta** (221 cal, 45 g carb) to **save 179 cal, 35 g carb**.
- Swap 1 cup sliced **cucumber** (8 cal, 2 g carb) for 6 **Saltines** (75 cal, 13 g carb) and **save 67 cal, 11 g carb**.
- Omit the **bun** from your burger or bread from your sandwich and **save AT LEAST 120 cal, 22 g carb** (depends on the size of the bun!)