

Basic carbohydrate counting for diabetes management



Carbohydrate counting is a flexible way to plan your meals. It focuses on foods that contain carbohydrate as these raise your blood sugar the most. Follow these steps to count carbohydrates and help manage your blood sugar levels. Your registered dietitian will guide you along the way.

STEP 1 Make healthy food choices

- Enjoy a variety of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low fat milk products, and meat and alternatives at your meals. A variety of foods will help to keep you healthy.
- Use added fats in small amounts. This helps to control your weight and blood cholesterol.
- Choose portion sizes to help you to reach or maintain a healthy weight.

STEP 2 Focus on carbohydrate

- Your body breaks down carbohydrate into sugar (glucose). This raises your blood sugar levels.
- Carbohydrate is found in many foods including grains and starches, fruits, some vegetables, legumes, milk and milk alternatives, sugary foods and many prepared foods.
- Meat and alternatives, most vegetables and fats contain little carbohydrate. Moderate servings will not have a big effect on blood sugar levels.

STEP 3 Set carbohydrate goals

- Your dietitian will help you set a goal for grams of carbohydrate at each meal and snack. This may be the same from day to day or may be flexible, depending on your needs.
- Aim to meet your target within 5 grams per meal or snack.

STEP 4 Determine carbohydrate content

- Write down what you eat and drink throughout the day.
- Be sure to note the portion sizes. You may need to use measuring cups and food scales to be accurate.
- Record the grams of carbohydrate in these foods and drinks.
- For carbohydrate content of foods, check the *Beyond the Basics* resources, food packages, food composition books, restaurant fact sheets and websites.

STEP 5 Monitor effect on blood sugar level

- Work with your health-care team to correct blood sugar levels that are too high or too low.

Nutrition Facts	
Per 90 g serving (2 slices)	
Amount	% Daily Value
Calories 170	
Fat 2.7 g	4 %
Saturated 0.5 g + Trans 0 g	5 %
Cholesterol 0 mg	
Sodium 200 mg	8 %
Carbohydrate 36 g	13 %
Fibre 6 g	24 %
Sugars 3 g	
Protein 8 g	
Vitamin A 1 %	Vitamin C 0 %
Calcium 2 %	Iron 16 %

Finding carbohydrate values using the Nutrition Facts table

The amount of carbohydrate in a food is listed on the Nutrition Facts table.

- The amount listed is for the serving size given. Are you eating more, less, or the same amount? Compare your serving size to figure out the amount of carbohydrate you are eating.
- The total amount of carbohydrate in grams is listed first. This number includes starch, sugars and fibre. (Starch is not listed separately.)
- Fibre does not raise blood sugar and should be subtracted from the total carbohydrate (i.e. 36 g carbohydrate – 6 g fibre = 30 g available carbohydrate).

Let's carb count! Sample carbohydrate counting

Food	Portion size	Grams of carbohydrate	Carbohydrate choices
Example – sandwich lunch			
Bread, whole wheat*	2 slices	30 g	2
Chicken breast	2 oz/60 g	0	0
Margarine	1 tsp/5 mL	0	0
Carrot sticks	½ cup/125 mL	0	0
Green grapes*	½ cup/125 mL	15 g	1
Milk*	1 cup/250 mL	15 g	1
Tea/coffee	1 cup/250 mL	0	0
	TOTAL	60 g	4 choices
What did you eat and drink? (write it below)			
	TOTAL		

*Carbohydrate containing food

Related articles: *Just the basics for healthy eating, Glycemic Index, and Sugars and sweeteners*

DIABETES CANADA

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