

Diabetes

Diabetes and Carbs

Planning what to eat and when to eat is very important—especially if you have diabetes. Counting carbohydrates, or carbs—adding up all the carbs in everything you eat and drink—can help people with diabetes manage their blood sugar levels.

What are carbs?

Along with proteins and fats, carbs are one of three main nutrients found in foods and drinks. The carbs you eat have a direct effect on your blood sugar.

How many carbs should I eat?

There's no "one size fits all" answer—everyone is different because everyone's body is different. On average, people with diabetes should get about 45% of their calories from carbs. A carb serving is measured as 15 grams per serving. That means most women need 3 to 4 carb servings (45–60 grams) per meal, while most men need about 4 to 5 carb servings (60–75 grams). However, these amounts depend on your age, weight, activity level, and diabetes medications. Make sure to work with a dietitian to set your own carb goal. If you use insulin, ask about options to match your insulin dose to the amount of food you eat at meals and snacks.



Why should I count carbs?

Carb counting can help keep your blood sugar levels close to your target range, which can help you:

- Stay healthy longer.
- Feel better and improve your quality of life.
- Prevent or delay diabetes complications such as heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, blindness, nerve damage, and lower-limb amputation (surgery to remove a body part).

It may be helpful to count carbs in the foods you eat most often to help you understand how it works.

What foods have carbs?

Common foods with carbs:

- Grains, such as bread, noodles, pasta, crackers, cereals, and rice.
- Fruits, such as apples, bananas, berries, mangoes, melons, and oranges.
- Dairy products, such as milk and yogurt.
- Legumes, including dried beans, lentils, and peas.
- Snack foods and sweets, such as cakes, cookies, candy, and other desserts.
- Juices, soft drinks, fruit drinks, sports drinks, and energy drinks that contain sugar.
- Starchy vegetables, such as potatoes, corn, and peas.

Non-starchy vegetables, such as asparagus, broccoli, carrots, celery, green beans, lettuce, and other salad greens, mushrooms, radishes, spinach, tomatoes, and zucchini, have fewer carbs than starchy vegetables.

Try to limit foods that have added sugars, like sweets and fruit drinks, or are made with refined carbs, such as white bread, white rice, and most pasta. Instead, choose carbs such as fruit, vegetables, whole grain bread, brown rice, and beans.

Foods with about 15 grams of carbs:

- A small piece of fruit.
- 1 slice of bread.
- 1/2 cup cooked oatmeal.
- 1/3 cup cooked pasta or rice.
- 4 to 6 crackers.
- 1/2 cup black beans or other starchy vegetable.
- 1/4 large baked potato.
- 2/3 cup nonfat yogurt.

Foods with few or no carbs:

- Meat, fish, and poultry.
- Some types of cheese (check nutrition labels on packaged cheese).
- Nuts.
- Oils and other fats.

For a more inclusive carb list, see the American Diabetes Association's [Carbohydrate Choice List](#).

For foods that have a nutrition label, add up the grams of carbs per serving.

This nutrition label tells you:

- Serving size—1½ cups.
- Servings in the container—2.
- Total carb grams per serving—46.
- Other nutrition information, including calories, protein, fat, vitamins, and minerals per serving.

If you eat the entire container, you've had two servings instead of one. Multiply carb grams in one serving by two to get the correct amount of carbs you have eaten: $46\text{g} \times 2 = 92\text{g}$.

For foods that don't have a nutrition label like fruits and vegetables, use an app, website, or book to estimate the amount of carbs.

Remember to count carbs in beverages. Fruit juices and alcoholic beverages, such as beer and sweet mixed drinks, add lots of carbs.

Sugars can be added during processing or preparation. Drinks with added sugars include:

- Sugar-sweetened soft drinks, fruit drinks, sports drinks, and energy drinks.
- Any drink sweetened with:
 - Sugar, raw sugar, brown sugar, or invert sugar.
 - Corn syrup or malt syrup.
 - High-fructose corn syrup, often used in soft drinks and juices.
 - Honey, molasses, or agave nectar.
 - Anything ending in "ose": dextrose, fructose, glucose, lactose, or sucrose.

You *can* eat foods with added sugars, but be sure to ask a dietitian or diabetes educator what they recommend for you. Foods and drinks with added sugars are often high in calories and low in the vitamins, minerals, and fiber your body needs.

Nutrition Facts	
2 servings per container	
Serving size 1 1/2 cup (208g)	
Amount per serving	
Calories	240
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 4g	5%
Saturated Fat 1.5g	8%
<i>Trans Fat</i> 0g	
Cholesterol 5mg	2%
Sodium 430mg	19%
Total Carbohydrate 46g	17%
Dietary Fiber 7g	25%
Total Sugars 4g	
Includes 2g Added Sugars	4%
Protein 11g	
Vitamin D 2mcg	10%
Calcium 260mg	20%
Iron 6mg	35%
Potassium 240mg	6%

* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

More Information

[Carb Counts](#)

[Carbohydrate Counting & Diabetes](#) [↗](#)

[Healthy Eating](#)  [PDF - 469KB] 
[Eat Well](#)

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