

Why Are Carbohydrates Important For Our Bodies?

Before Getting Started...

Take a few minutes to discuss the following questions with your nutritionist:

- What comes to mind when you hear the word “carbohydrates”?
- What foods have carbohydrates?
- What do you think carbohydrates are used for in the body?

The Facts on Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates (also called “carbs”) like sugars, starches, and fibers are nutrients found in foods and drinks that give us energy. The brain alone uses about 120 grams of carbohydrates for energy each day!

There are two different types of carbohydrates:

1. Simple carbohydrates are found in dairy, fruits, and vegetables, and in sweet foods like juice, soda, cookies and candies. These types of carbohydrates are rapidly digested to provide quick energy.
2. Complex carbohydrates are found in whole grains such as whole-wheat bread and pasta, along with beans, potatoes, and corn. These types of carbohydrates take longer to digest so they give us more long-lasting energy.

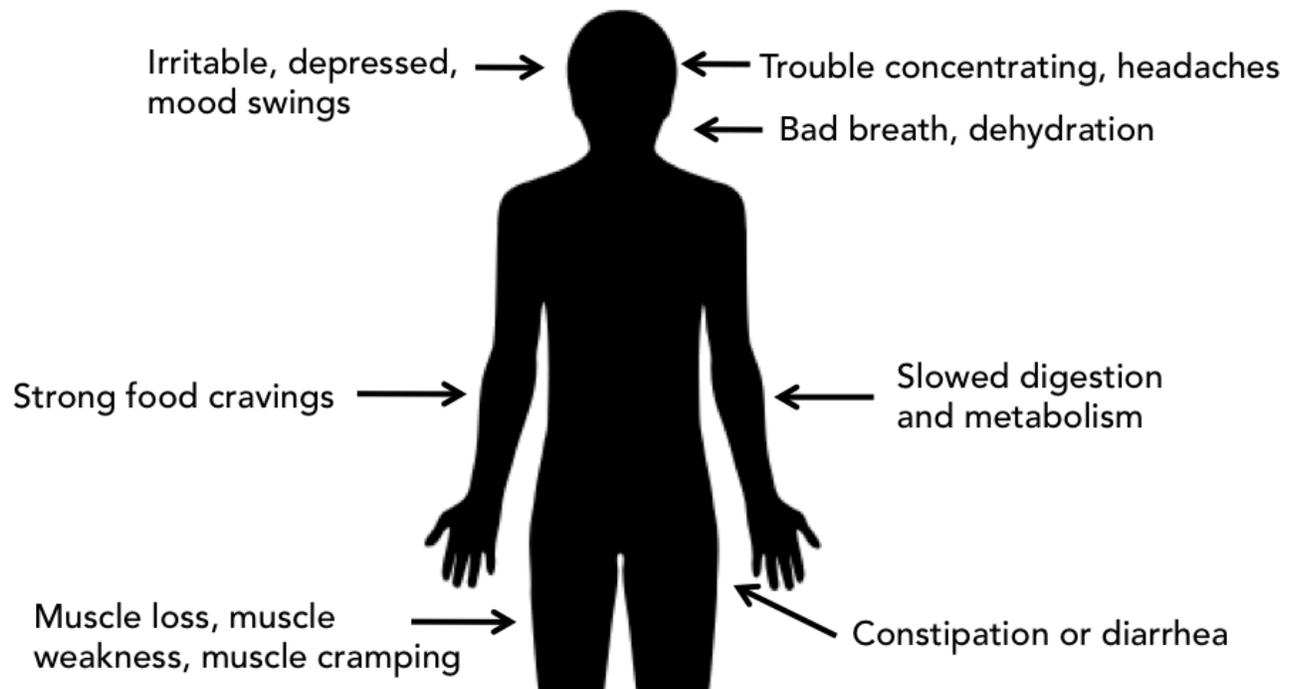
What Does Our Body Use Carbohydrates For?

Both types of carbohydrates have important roles in the body. Here are a few:

- For energy to think and concentrate all day long, so you don't have a foggy brain
- For energy to regulate your emotions so you aren't *hangry* (hungry + angry)
- For energy to move your muscles, whether you're climbing up a flight of stairs or warming up before a soccer game
- For fiber to keep your digestive tract healthy and to prevent constipation or diarrhea
- For B vitamins to support your metabolism, keep your immune system healthy, and prevent mood swings
- For stable blood sugar levels to keep hunger in check and prevent strong cravings



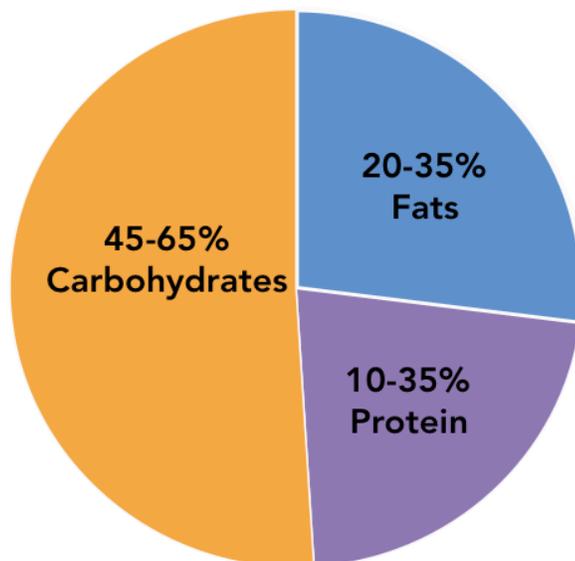
What Happens If I Don't Eat Enough Carbohydrates?



How Many Carbohydrates Does My Body Need?

The amount of carbs that your body needs varies depending on your energy needs.

Recommended Percent of Energy From Food



Generally, it's important to try to have a source of carbs at all meals and snacks.

Breakfast Examples:

- Cereal with milk and walnuts
- Whole-wheat bagel with eggs
- Oatmeal with fruit and yogurt

Lunch/Dinner Examples:

- Pita bread with a tuna salad
- Brown rice in a tofu and veggie stir-fry
- Baked potato with fish and spinach

Snack Examples:

- Raisins, chocolate chips, and nuts
- Whole-grain tortilla chips with salsa
- Popcorn with parmesan cheese

What Does This Mean For Me?

Take a few minutes to think through the information shared in this handout and answer the questions listed below:

1. What are some foods that you eat or used to eat that provide your body with carbs?
2. Have you noticed any signs that your body may not be getting enough carbs?
3. What are some ways you feel comfortable making changes to your eating?

References:

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Trumbo, Paula, et al. "Dietary reference intakes for energy, carbohydrate, fiber, fat, fatty acids, cholesterol, protein and amino acids." *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* 102.11 (2002): 1621.