

The Wellness News

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Carbohydrates: Essential for a healthy diet

In recent years, carbohydrates have developed a bad reputation, being blamed for everything from obesity to insulin resistance. Assorted diets have popped up in mainstream culture that promotes this mindset of reducing carbohydrates. Although it is true that some forms of carbohydrates, such as sugar and white flours, should be eaten in moderation, carbohydrates are actually an essential component of a healthy diet, especially in the form of whole grains.

Problems with Low Carb Diets:

While it is true that low carb diets often result in initial weight loss, low carb diet plans may provide misleading information that can sometimes lead to health issues.

Sustainability: Although many users of low carb diets do see an initial weight loss, they often find the diet is hard to maintain long term. A study comparing low fat and low carb diets found that after a year, people dropped out of both diets at a similar rate and returned to their starting weights. This suggests that, like so many fad diets, eating low carb is not a sustainable lifestyle change and weight lost from this diet will be hard to maintain.

Too Much Protein and Fat: Individuals on low carb diets often replace carbohydrates with excess protein and fat. According to national health guidelines, calories from protein should only make up 10-35% of our daily caloric intake and total calories from fat should be limited to around 30%. On a low carb diet, these percentages increase

significantly. High protein diets are linked with health risks such as kidney stones, high cholesterol, ketosis, and impaired kidney function. High fat diets, especially ones high in saturated fats, can lead to an increased risk for heart disease, diabetes, and certain types of cancers.

Low Fiber Intake: Low carb diets include a lot of protein and fat, but not nearly enough fiber. For a healthy adult, national health organizations recommend 25-35 grams of fiber each day. Fiber is associated with a reduced risk for developing various chronic conditions including type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and colon cancer. In addition, fiber helps treat and prevent constipation. The fiber found in whole grains, such as wheat bran and oat bran, seems to be particularly effective.

Bored with whole wheat? Switch it up! Some whole grains to try:
brown rice, wild rice, quinoa,
barley, whole wheat couscous,
bulgur, popcorn, oatmeal,
buckwheat, wheat berries, whole
rye, millet, triticale, and teff.

Problems with Low Carb Diets cont...

Misuse of the Glycemic Index: The Glycemic Index, the foundation of many low carb diets, is based on the idea that certain foods cause a rapid rise in blood sugar upon digestion. The Index ranks the foods on a scale of 0-100, with pure glucose being ranked 100. This scale is helpful for determining which foods have the greatest effect on blood sugar levels and is especially informative for diabetics. However, the food chart can be misleading as some healthful foods, specifically carrots, potatoes, and a number of fruits, appear to be poor choices, while other foods that should be eaten in moderation rank lower on the scale and therefore appear to be good choices.

Limited Intake of Essential Nutrients: With a reduction in carbohydrates there also comes a reduction in many important vitamins and nutrients. Low carb diets restrict the daily intake of produce and whole grains, correspondingly limiting the intake of Vitamin A, Vitamin C, folic acid, dietary fiber, carotenoids, and numerous phytochemicals that dietitians are still learning more about.

The Importance of Whole Grains:

Not all carbohydrates are created equal. More than half of your calories consumed from grains should come from whole grains, which help provide your body with numerous health benefits.

Disease Prevention: Diets that include at least 2 servings of whole grains each day are linked with a reduced chance of developing cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, certain cancers, and intestinal complications. This decreased risk is associated with the many nutrients whole grains provide for our bodies.

Essential Nutrients: Whole grains are rich in important nutrients, such as magnesium, selenium, copper, iron, folate, and dietary fiber. These nutrients perform important jobs within the body including forming red blood cells, assisting with metabolism, carrying oxygen, and assisting with regular bowel movements.

Weight Improvement: Including at least 3 servings of whole grains in your diet may be linked with weight management. Researchers associate this link with the satisfaction derived from eating foods high in fiber and nutrients. The fiber in whole grains provides volume and slows the digestion process, both important components when trying to feel full on fewer calories.

Increase your Intake of Whole Grains:

- Look under ingredients lists for “whole wheat”, “whole oats”, or “whole rye” to be listed first.
- Replace regular pasta with whole grain or whole wheat pasta.
- Try popcorn instead of chips or pretzels for a healthy whole grain snack.
- Start your day with oatmeal or another whole grain cereal.
- Add a half cup of brown rice or bulgur to your salad.
- Use corn or whole wheat tortillas instead of flour with your next burrito.



Call Your Health Coach for More Information 1-800-433-2320

Sources:

www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource; www.mypyramid.gov; www.mayoclinic.com;
www.webmd.com; www.nutritiondata.com