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Created for Greatist by Healthline experts. Read moreShow your hand, if the word carbohydrates haunt your dreams. With all the testing and eating planning and repetitive rounds and injecting and sobbing over this plate of cookies you can't have, managing diabetes can be a real challenge – especially when it comes to counting carbohydrates. We can't explain why some of the most delicious foods also happen to be sweet, carby monsters at the top of the Glycemic Index. But we can promise that cutting out carbohydrates is much less painful than you think. In fact, a low-carb diet includes tons of tasty foods and is an important part of managing diabetes. But what exactly is a low carb, and how do you make sure you're staying healthy and feeling full? Let us explain. The reason carbohydrates affect your blood sugar is because they're broken down in your body like glucose. This means exactly your blood sugar level, which can spike and then drop if you're eating carbohydrates often or in large quantities. Carbohydrates are two main forms: simple carbohydrates (refined sugar or starch) that break down quickly in your body, or complex carbohydrates (nutrient rich, fiber rich carbohydrates) that take longer for your body to process. Usually, you will notice that simple carbohydrates affect your blood sugar more dramatically as they hit your bloodstream quickly. Complex carbohydrates, however, have higher fiber and more fillings, which reduces the likelihood you over-consume them. The main food groups containing carbohydrates are grains, fruits, starch-based vegetables, legumes, dairy products and natural sweeteners such as honey, agaves nectar and maple syrup. Complex carbohydrates on this list – such as starch vegetables, whole fruits, and legumes – are important parts of a healthy diet, so you don't want to cut them. But being aware of your diet profile – and the fact that they can cause blood sugar to rise – will help you understand the right part when to eat them and when to reduce. The amount of carbohydrates you eat every day will vary from person to person, so it is important to talk to your doctor or nutritionist before starting a new diet that can affect your health. But overall, scaling back on carby food will help you manage blood sugar more easily. Research on how much carbohydrates you need to manage diabetes is inconclusive. Because each body is different, there is no magic number of everyday carbohydrates that will work for each person. Some studies have shown that a ketogenic lifestyle, a super low carb approach that limits your intake to about 20-50 grams of carbohydrates per day, is effective in reducing the symptoms of diabetes. But it can be a bit extreme for the average person, and can actually make symptoms worse if you're not following the diet properly. Other studies have shown that carbohydrates up to 20 to 45 percent of your daily calorie calories approximately 90-180grams is an effective long-term strategy for the treatment of diabetes. Since the average person eats about 45 to 65 percent of their daily calories as carbohydrates, this means reducing their carb intake by about half to help manage diabetes. If you're not yet counting carbs, this is a good place to start. The American Diabetes Association recommends a carbohydrate counting way to give you more flexibility when planning your meals – not to mention, it's empowering to understand how your body will react to a variety of foods. It also helps you know how much insulin you will need to take throughout the day. If possible, take a peek at the dietary label before eating and log your carbs accordingly. For unlabelled foods such as produce, check out the U.S. Department of Agriculture's food database. You can look up nutritional information for only any food by keyword and manufacturer. Finally, if all this logging feels overwhelming, try the carb counting app to simplify the process. Once you've figured out how much carbohydrate you're eating a day, and how many times you're eating them, you'll be in a better place to know how much carbohydrate you should limit. Ideally you should space your meals evenly throughout the day to avoid spikes or crashes in blood sugar levels. The American Diabetes Association says that this balance is a little different for everyone, but you won't be set up to succeed if you graze permanently or wait until the end of the day to eat one huge meal. Usually, if you can maintain a consistent amount of fuel in your system throughout the day, your body can more easily manage blood sugar levels. Always check your blood sugar level to determine how many carbohydrates your body can process at any time. What works for you may not work for anyone, so don't dive headfirst into the carb limit without taking care of your body and your needs. Generally, people who use often need more carbohydrates to maintain their active lifestyle – not to mention, some people just seem to tolerate carbohydrates better than others. It may take some trial and error to get to a place that feels right right in your body. If you're new to limiting carbohydrates, it's best to start small and lightly into the changes. Focus on eating high quality, whole foods and limiting your intake of processed products. A diet rich in healthy fats, such as nuts, olive oil, avocado, coconut, and high-fat dairy products, will help you feel fuller for longer and rely less on carbohydrates. And yes, you can still eat bread sometimes! While you monitor your daily carbohydrate intake, taking oral meds as prescribed or adjusting insulin doses accordingly, your doctor does not specify otherwise, you never have to stick to a strict plan without exceptions. It's all about moderation. Usually, if you keep your grocery trips focused on plants that are not starch and animal products, you're also on your way to living a low carb life. Fun Life Hack: Try shopping around the outer edges of the grocery store so you can avoid processed food that is usually concentrated inside the aisles. Add or subtract carbohydrates as needed until you find the perfect balance — which you'll find out when your energy levels stay the same throughout the day (i.e. no midday emergency or late evening highs). The recipe inspo has serious tons of options, so you shouldn't ever freak out about changing your cooking routine. Eggs, avocado, or full-fat yogurt make great breakfast meals, or paleo bagels – yes, they're the thing. For lunch, prep some stuffed peppers or salad wraps to take you to the office – they're a great way to shake things out of your sad table sandwich situation. And for dinner, you can get super creative with it. Try eggplant lasagna, tacos bowls with cauliflower rice, or even zucchini noodles to sub pasta. PSA: Make sure you're not eating less just because you're eating differently. If you decide to eat less grain, for example, you want to replace these calories with healthy fats, proteins, and fiber, assuming you weren't eating king-size portions to begin with. The number of calories you need depends on your weight management goals. It can be easy to get into thinking limiting foods without remembering to replace them, but your body needs adequate nutrients to keep you running. Starving your body can turn into a slower metabolism and difficulty losing weight, which is an issue if your doctor has recommended weight loss. If in doubt, your doctor or nutritionist can help you hammer out information about what, how much, and when to eat. Stick to it and you should be able to successfully keep your diabetes symptoms in check. Half-Baked Harvest How we love carbs-pasta, bread, grains, all these good things, carbs don't always love us back. Experts say a low-carb diet can actually be a good way to keep your health in check (glucose and insulin levels are decreasing, which reduces fat storage in the body) and maintain a healthy lifestyle, but for those with meat-free diet preferences and restrictions, what about trying to follow a low carb vegetarian diet? It's a bit more challenging, but it's definitely usable with some instructions. The good news is that a low-carb diet is not due to the calorie counting method, which tends to make people feel deprived, says Juliana Shalek, MS, RD, CD.N., and founder of Nutrition Suite LLC. On a low-carb diet, you can still fill up on protein and healthy fats, which can be very satisfying, Shalek explains, adding that you can still have carbs that are more with lower glycemic indexes such as oatmeal, beans, and whole grain bread because they have a less significant effect on our glucose glucose To be clear, our body needs carbohydrates to perform its processes, but when we consume too much carbohydrates, the body starts storing it as fat. Carbohydrates, such as proteins, and fats, are macronutrients used by the body for energy. As macronutrients, carbohydrates play an important role in our body, and if we completely reduce them, we will most likely resume them later. If you are following a low-carb vegetarian diet, Shalek says, you should continuously monitor your protein levels because you won't be getting some nutrients from meat. But other than that, you're good to go. Shalek strongly recommends against completely removing carbohydrates from your diet. Carbohydrates play an important role in our body, and if we completely reduce them, we will most likely overeat them later, Shalek explains. So I call mindfulness: Choosing whole grains instead of refined carbohydrates, watching portion sizes, and trying to spread portions of carbohydrates evenly and consistently over the course of the day to promote better blood glucose control. That said, what foods should you consume over a low carb vegetarian diet? We asked Shalek to share her 15 favorites, and one day is worth the go-to meals that include them. This nut is a good choice because it has a lot of protein, fiber, and heart-healthy fat. In addition, Shalek says almonds are great snacks on-the-go (just try to choose unsalted). However, it is important to be wary of serving size, because they are high in fat, she notes. Carbohydrates: 7 grams per 1/4 cup chia seeds can be used as a high protein and high fiber topping your salad, smoothies, yogurt and cottage cheese. Plus, they're high in omega-3 fatty acids, which help reduce inflammation in the body and reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, explains Shalek. Worth noting: They contain about five grams of fiber per tablespoon, so technically your net carbs are low per serving. Carbohydrates: 5 grams per tablespoon of Chickpeas (aka what hummus is made of) is slightly high in carbohydrates, but is also high in fiber. They happen to be a good source of protein for vegetarians, says Shalek. If you are considering portion sizes, chickpeas are the perfect complement to any meal in general or pureed in shape. Carbohydrates: For 27 grams per 1/2 cup except rich in protein and calcium, fat-free Greek yogurt also contains probiotics to help digestive health. It's so versatile: in some dishes you can add fresh fruit or low-fat granola or use it as a lower fat substitute for mayonnaise or sour cream, explains Chalek. Carbohydrates: 9 grams per cup of Laughing Cow cheese packets are low in fat and calories, but still satisfy (and do we mention they also provide a punch of calcium?) They come in a variety of flavors that you can spread to fruits, vegetables, or cakes, says Shalek. Shalek. They come in cute little wedges that are portable. Carbohydrates: For one gram per cheese wedge Root and Revel Non-starch vegetables like cabbage and spinach is what I would call a good bang for your buck foods, says Shalek. This means that you can fill up on them without taking an abundance of calories, and they're high in fiber so they keep you full between meals. In addition, these veggies contain important vitamins such as C, A and K, plus iron. Carbohydrates: Less than one gram per 1/2 cup This tasty vegetable contains a variety of vitamins and minerals such as folate, potassium and vitamins C and K (plus, high in fiber). Use it instead of meat for your main course because it has a lot of stuffing. Carbohydrates: 5 grams per 1/2 cup Eggs are great in a low-carb vegetarian diet because they are protein rich and contain healthy fats (and keep you completely longer because of their high protein). Bonus points: They are easy to prepare and you can avoid monotony by cooking them in different ways, says Shalek. You can remove the yolk if you're watching cholesterol levels, she says. Carbohydrates: Less than 1 gram per egg Tofu is an excellent source of protein for non-meat eaters, and it is so versatile that it can be used in different dishes, says Shalek. It has low calorie and fat content and high levels of iron and calcium. Carbohydrates: 5 grams per cup Like tofu, tempeh is also a good source of protein for non-meat eaters, and it's just as versatile, says Shalek. Plus, it contains probiotics. Carbohydrates: About 8 grams per 1/2 cup of berries are high in fiber, antioxidants, vitamin C, and folate, all of which have a beneficial effect on your body. Do take care of appropriate portion sizes because they contain sugar, although they are also high in fiber to remove significant sugar spikes and to keep you completely longer, says Shalek. Carbohydrates: For 11 grams per 1/2 cup you can add fruit and nuts or a mixture of smoothie added protein for breakfast or snacks, says Shalek. In case you don't know, curd is an excellent source of protein, calcium and vitamin B12 (just choose a low-fat version if possible.) Carbohydrates: 6 grams per 1/2 cup If you're on avocado, here's the good news: They contain healthy fats rich in monounsaturated fatty acids and important nutrients including folate, vitamins C and K, and potassium. They're high in fiber, keep you full, and help regulate blood glucose levels. Eat them on their own, as spread, or as a dip, suggests Shalek. Carbohydrates: About 9 grams per 1/2 avocado A little goes a long way: Spread it on an apple, a piece of celery, a whole grain cracker or eat it on its own. This is a very satisfying snack to keep you full between meals because it has so much protein, says Shalek. Carbohydrates: 3 grams per tablespoon So it's not quite quite food per se, but olive oil is definitely low in carbohydrates and has many beneficial health properties (it actually contains zero carbohydrates.) It is rich in monounsaturated fatty acids, which help to reduce inflammation and protect against cardiovascular diseases, says Charles. It's great for cooking and salad dressings. Just stick to serving the size of one tablespoon to avoid too many extra calories. Carbohydrates: 0 minimalist Baker Breakfast: Egg white omelette with tomato, broccoli, spinach, and one slice of Swiss cheese, as well as one cup of plain Greek yogurt with berries Lunch: Chopped salad with spinach, beans, tofu, tofu, tomatoes, mushrooms, 1/4 avocado, one tablespoon of grated Parmesan cheese, sown with light olive oil and balm. Dinner: Grilled eggplant slices with grilled tomatoes and feta cheese on top, one tablespoon olive oil, seasoned with garlic powder. Appetizers: 1/4 cup unsalted almond, 1/2 cup cottage cheese with apple, one cup of unsalted air popped popcorn. For extra flavor, sprinkle some Parmesan cheese on top. Top.

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