



## The Great Carbohydrate

**Carbohydrates** (car-bo-hi-drayts) are sometimes also called carbs or carbos, and your body can make them. Carbs come in two different types: sugars and starches. Sugars are called **simple carbohydrates**. They are called simple because your body digests them quickly and easily. Simple carbs are usually sweet tasting, like cookies, candy, soda, and other sugary foods. And some foods from nature - like many fruits - are sources of simple carbohydrates.

Starchy carbohydrates have their own name, too: **complex carbohydrates**. These carbohydrates take longer to be digested than simple carbohydrates do. Complex carbs are found in foods like bread, noodles, and rice, and in lots of tasty veggies.

## Why Do We Need Carbohydrates?

Carbohydrates have an important job: giving all the cells in your body the energy they need! When you eat foods with carbohydrates in them, your body breaks them down into two different types of fuel.

For energy that you'll use right away, your body takes those carbs and turns them into **glucose** (gloo-kose). Glucose is carried in your blood to all the cells in your body, and gives you energy. It powers every part of your body. Glucose lets you run, jump, think, blink, breath, and more. Want to swim up and down the coast? Or just make a tiny piece of toast? Whatever you do, as long as you're using your body, you need the great power of glucose. Have you ever felt hungry and found it kind of hard to think? That's because you were running out of glucose, and your brain needed more fuel.

But your cells can only use so much glucose at one time. So when there is glucose left over that can't be used right away, your cells save it. But there's no sticking it in the refrigerator like regular leftovers - instead, this leftover glucose is stored in your liver and muscles, and it's called **glycogen** (glie-ko-jen). The glycogen that doesn't fit into your liver and muscle cells is turned to fat.

Glycogen hangs out until it's needed, and is then released for quick energy when you're exercising. Your body decides to release the power from either glycogen or fat depending on the type of sport or activity you're doing, and how long you're doing it. If you're sprinting or doing another quick exercise,

your body calls on glycogen for energy. But if you are exercising for a long time, your body turns to its "reserve tank" of fuel for energy: fat.

## How Do We Get Carbohydrates?

Carbohydrates are in lots of foods, but carbs are very different from each other - and if you guessed that complex carbs are different from simple carbs, you're right! That's because **simple carbohydrates** are absorbed into your blood much faster, and while they provide some really quick energy, they can often come with lots of fat and lack important [vitamins](#) that your body needs. So while a can of soda or a candy bar every once in a while isn't too bad, you wouldn't want to make these simple carbohydrates a regular part of the food you eat.

Many fruits are a good source of simple carbs, though - so if you're looking for some quick energy and a healthy snack, these are the way to go! Apples, bananas, grapes, and raisins pull out in front of the simple carbs pack. And fruit cocktail, oranges, and pears will get carbs in there. Finally, don't forget to say yum to ice cream and frozen yogurt - both are good ways to get simple carbs, as well as fat, protein, and other vitamins and minerals.

## Complex Carbohydrates

**Complex carbohydrates** are the slowpokes of the group: they give you energy more slowly. They take longer to be digested, so your body needs more time to release these carbs into your blood as glucose. Complex carbs are better when you are exercising or playing in a game, because you can count on them to give you energy that lasts through the ninth inning or the fourth quarter! Complex carbs also beat simple carbs because they usually come with lots of vitamins and minerals your body needs.

It's easy to get the complex carbs your body likes to use as fuel - they are in bread, cereals, and pasta. And if you think complex carbs sound nice, then help yourself to a bowl of rice! It's a great source of complex carbs, just like oatmeal, pretzels, and even bagels. If you're a very veggie kind of kid, then you're in luck, because corn, potatoes, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, carrots, cucumbers, lettuce, and peppers are all great ways to get complex carbs.