



Counting Carbs?

Understanding Glycemic Index & Glycemic Load

You've probably heard of **glycemic index** and **glycemic load**. Some studies suggest that sticking to foods with a low glycemic index may help prevent diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer. Some claim it helps with weight loss. The truth is, we don't know all the answers yet.

Here's what you need to know.

The glycemic index and load concern carbohydrates, or carbs—one of the main types of nutrients in our diets. Carbs with a simple chemical structure are called sugars. Sugars are found naturally in foods like fruits, vegetables and milk products. They're also added to many foods and drinks. Complex carbs, like starches and fiber, are found in whole-grain breads and cereals, starchy vegetables and legumes.

Your digestive system changes the carbs you eat into glucose, a type of sugar that your body uses for energy. Simple carbs are more quickly digested and absorbed than complex ones, so simple carbs can raise your blood glucose levels faster and higher.

People with diabetes need to manage their blood glucose levels. High blood glucose can damage tissues and organs. In time, it can lead to heart disease, blindness, kidney failure and other problems. If you have diabetes, controlling your blood glucose will prevent or delay these health complications. So it's important to understand how foods and drinks affect your blood sugar.

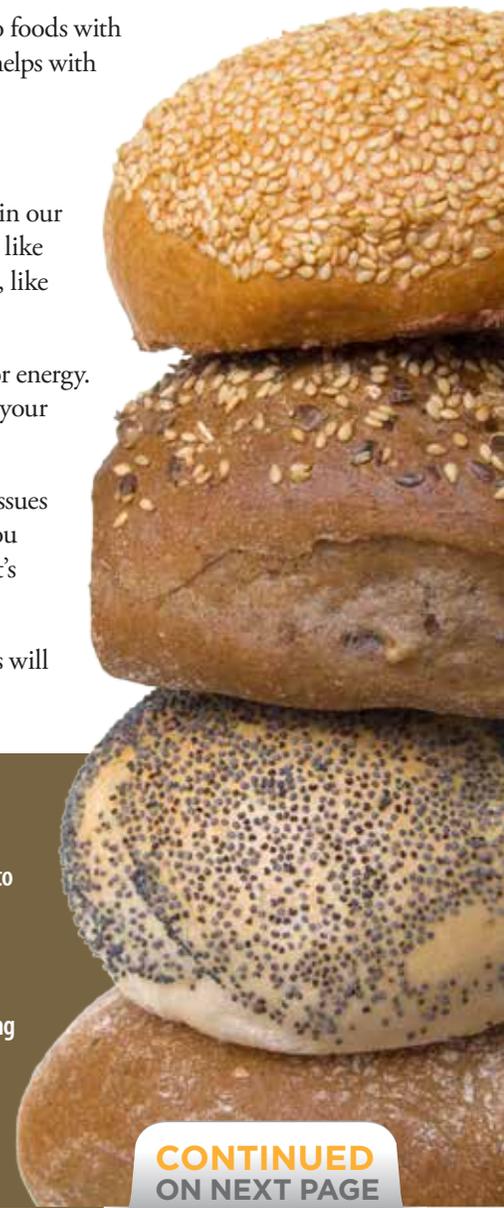
Researchers also note that evidence seems to support the concept that more complex carbohydrates will lead to better blood sugar control than the more simple sugars.

A Closer Look at Carbs

Carbohydrates are the most important source of energy for your body. Your digestive system changes carbohydrates into glucose (blood sugar). Your body uses this sugar for energy for your cells, tissues and organs. It stores any extra sugar in your liver and muscles for when it is needed.

Carbohydrates are called simple or complex, depending on their chemical structure. Simple carbohydrates include sugars found naturally in foods such as fruits, vegetables, milk, and milk products. They also include sugars added during food processing and refining. Complex carbohydrates include whole grain breads and cereals, starchy vegetables and legumes. Many of the complex carbohydrates are good sources of fiber.

For a healthy diet, limit the amount of added sugar that you eat and choose whole grains over refined grains.



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What are the Glycemic Index and Glycemic Load?

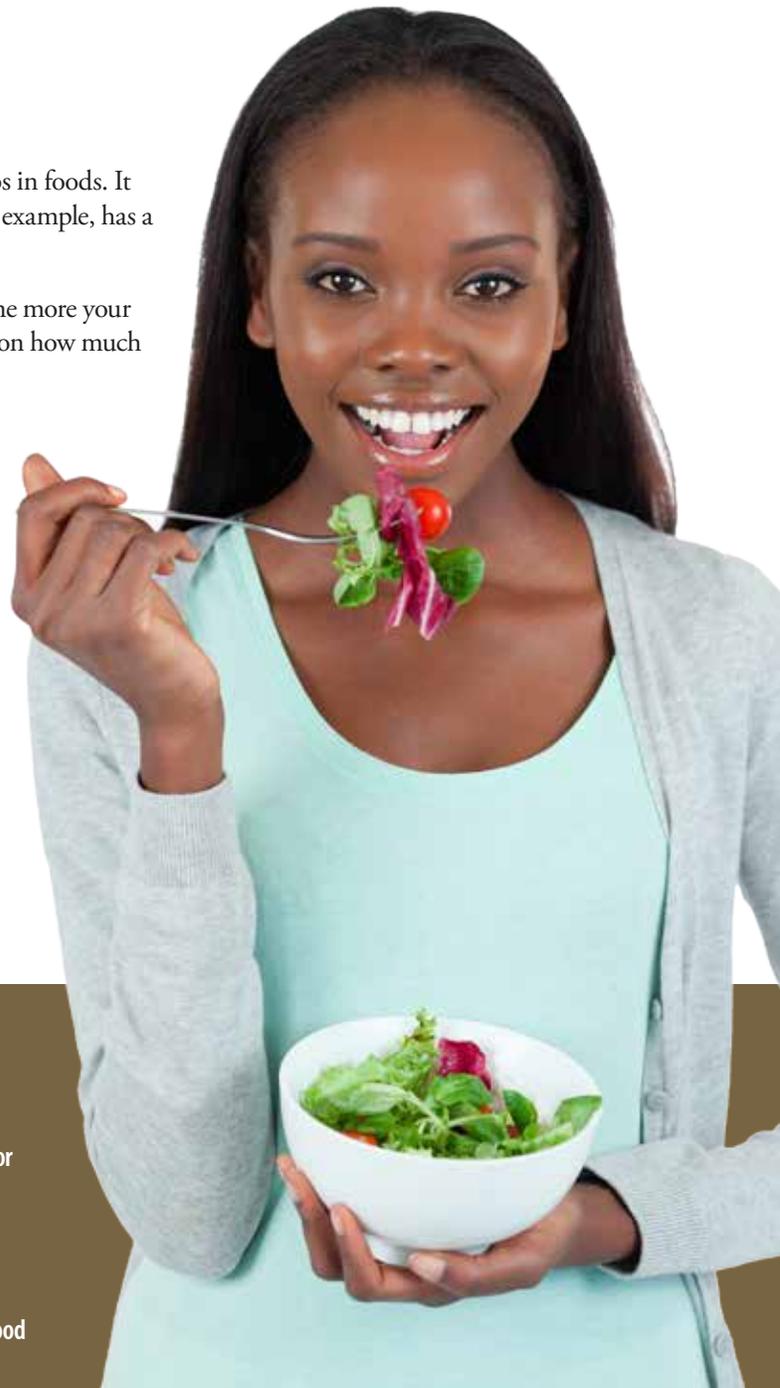
Researchers developed the glycemic index to measure the quality of carbs in foods. It shows how the carbs in different foods raise blood sugar. White rice, for example, has a higher glycemic index than brown rice, which has more complex carbs.

But it's not just the types of carbs that matter. The more carbs you eat, the more your blood sugar rises. The glycemic index really doesn't take into consideration how much you eat.

That's why researchers came up with the concept of glycemic load. It captures both the types of carbs in a food and the amount of carbs in a serving. Essentially, it shows how a portion of food affects your blood sugar. Many things affect the glycemic load, including food processing, how ripe a fruit is, how a food is prepared and how long it's been stored.

Glycemic index and glycemic load aren't things you'll see on a label, so they're not easy to use. But labels do show helpful information: calories, total carbohydrates, sugars and fiber.

It makes sense for everybody, not only diabetics, to eat the more complex carbohydrates because they will be more gradually absorbed, and blood sugar highs and lows will be smaller. Whole foods with complex carbs will give you more minerals and vitamins, too, and are usually good sources of fiber.



Choose More Complex Carbs

- Choose cereals high in fiber (5 or more grams per serving).
- Switch to whole grains. Look for whole-grain bread, whole-wheat pasta, brown or wild rice, barley, quinoa and bulgur.
- Eat more fresh fruits and vegetables and drink less juice.
- Don't forget legumes. Try different kinds of beans and lentils.
- Snack on fruit and small portions of nuts and seeds. Limit candy and other junk food