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Diabetes: Counting Carbs if You Don't Use Insulin

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Overview

Carbohydrate counting is a skill that can help you plan your diet to manage type 2 diabetes and control your blood sugar. This technique helps you determine the amount of sugar and starch (carbohydrates) in the foods you eat so you can spread carbohydrates throughout the day, preventing high blood sugar after meals. Carbohydrate counting gives you the flexibility to eat what you want and increases your sense of control and confidence in managing your diabetes.

- Carbohydrate is the nutrient that most affects your blood sugar.
- Carbohydrate counting helps you keep your blood sugar at your target level.
- You can consult a registered dietitian or certified diabetes educator to help you master carbohydrate counting and plan meals.

How to count carbohydrates

Count carbohydrates and eat a balanced diet by:

- Working with a registered dietitian or certified diabetes educator. They can help you plan the amount of carbohydrates to include in each meal and snack, counting either grams or carbohydrate servings.
- Eating standard portions of carbohydrate foods. Each serving size or standard portion contains about 15 grams of carbohydrates. It might be helpful to measure and weigh your food when you are first learning what makes up a standard portion.
- Eating standard portions of foods that contain protein. Foods that contain protein (beans, eggs, meat, and cheese) are an important part of a balanced diet.
- Eating less saturated fat and trans fat. A balanced diet includes healthy fat. Talk with a registered dietitian about how much fat you need in your diet.

Know your daily amount

Your daily amount depends on several things—your weight, how active you are, what diabetes medicines you take, and what your goals are for your blood sugar levels. A registered dietitian or certified diabetes educator can help you plan how much carbohydrate to include in each meal and snack.

For most adults, a guideline for the daily amount of carbohydrates is:

- 45 to 60 grams at each meal. That's about the same as 3 to 4 carbohydrate servings.
- 15 to 20 grams at each snack. That's about the same as 1 carbohydrate serving.

Other helpful suggestions

Here are some other suggestions that will help you count carbohydrates:

- Read food labels for carbohydrate content. Notice the serving size shown on the package.
- Check your blood sugar level. If you do this before and 1 to 2 hours after eating, you will be able to see how food affects your blood sugar level.
- Use a food record to keep track of what you eat and your blood sugar results. At each regular visit with your dietitian or certified diabetes educator, or whenever you think your meal plan needs adjusting, you can review your food record.
- Get more help. The American Diabetes Association offers booklets to help people learn how to count carbohydrates, measure and weigh food, and read food labels. Also, you will need to talk with a registered dietitian or a certified diabetes educator to build a plan that fits your needs.

Credits

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