

DIABETES AND DIET: CARBOHYDRATES

WHAT ARE CARBOHYDRATES?

Carbohydrates, or carbs, can come in many forms, but the three main types are starch, sugar, and fiber. On nutrition labels on packaged foods, the term “total carbohydrate” refers to all three of these types. Carbohydrate foods should make up just one quarter of your plate. Examples and descriptions of each of the three main types are below:

STARCH

- » Vegetables like corn, winter squash, and all kinds of potatoes.
- » Grains like cereals, rice, and pasta.
- » Beans and lentils contain some starch (but also fiber).

SUGAR

- » Naturally-occurring sugars are found in milk or fruit.
- » Even though naturally-occurring sugars are “natural”, they should only be eaten a little. Limit naturally-occurring sugars to 1-cup/tennis ball size in one sitting.
- » Added sugars should be barely eaten or avoided (added or processed sugars are found in sodas, sweets, and baked goods).

FIBER

- » Fiber is not converted to glucose like other carbohydrates.
- » Helps to improve digestion, manage blood sugar, and reduce risk of heart disease and digestive cancers.
- » You may notice some of these foods are also in the starch category: some types of legumes like lentils, chickpeas, and beans.
- » Some examples of fibrous foods are:
 - » Fruits, especially those with edible skin like apples and pears, and those with edible seeds, like berries, tomatoes, and kiwi.
 - » Nuts and seeds are also a good source of fiber and are low in carbohydrates, but should be eaten in moderation because of the high fat content.
 - » Whole grains like quinoa, barley, farro, brown rice, whole oats, and whole wheat foods.