

Sane talk about starchy foods, fiber and calories

Surprise! Those starchy carbohydrate foods you've learned to avoid can be very good for you. Read why in the U.S. Dietary Guideline reprinted below, with comment from General Foods.

Suddenly it's in to eat more carbohydrates, especially those starchy foods that are high in other nutrients.

And eating excessive amounts of fatty foods is definitely out.

The Guideline at right recommends that when you cut back on fats and rich desserts, you should eat more foods high in carbohydrates like vegetables and fruits. And more starchy foods.

Starchy carbohydrate foods can be an important source of nutrients. Such foods include enriched and whole grain breads, all manner of grains, rice, corn, potatoes, spaghetti, macaroni, noodles, enriched hot and cold breakfast cereals, and dried beans.

These are foods we've come to think of as low in prestige, and fattening.

Wrong.

Starchy carbohydrate foods can be highly nutritious. Carbohydrates are no more fattening than protein, ounce for ounce. They have less than half the calories of fat.

So switching to more carbohydrate foods can even help you lose weight, if you don't overload them with rich sauces and gravies.

And many carbohydrate foods... especially grains, fruits and vegetables... are high in fiber.

As you know, "fiber" is the latest nutrition buzz word. It is politely called "nature's broom." Most of us could use more of it, but don't go overboard. Learn why at right.

Here are three basic principles to help you get the right balance of carbohydrates, fiber and calories in your diet.

1. Eat a wide variety of carbohydrate foods such as vegetables, fruits, peas, beans, grains. Get acquainted with the wide choice of both farm products and processed carbohydrate foods. Eat more beans and peas, fruits and berries, seeds and nuts. Eat more potatoes. Eat more whole grain bread, spaghetti, noodles, rice. Discover bulgar wheat and lentils. Rediscover oat, corn, wheat and bran breakfast cereals. Try various kinds of beans. The variety of carbohydrate foods is inspiring.

2. Eat with moderation. If you are overweight, cut back on the number of calories you eat by eating less of everything, particularly calorie-rich fats.

3. Balance the decrease in fatty foods with an increase in carbohydrates... especially vegetables, fruits and grains that provide fiber. Be sure to select from each of the food groups to provide the balance of nutrients you need for good health.

Study the U.S. Dietary Guideline at right. It is one of seven Guidelines General Foods is reprinting for your study. They are:

1. Eat a variety of foods.
2. Maintain ideal weight.
3. Avoid too much fat, saturated fat and cholesterol.
4. Eat foods with adequate starch and fiber.
5. Avoid too much sugar.
6. Avoid too much sodium.
7. If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation.

Watch for our reprint of "Avoid too much sugar" soon.



1. What do they mean by starch?

Starch is a form of complex carbohydrate that is found in grains, potatoes, rice and cereals. These kinds of foods are nutritious and also a source of fiber.

2. Aren't starchy foods terribly fattening? No, not if eaten in moderation. Ounce for ounce, carbohydrates have no more calories than protein, and half the calories of fat.

3. What is fiber? Fiber is another one of the several forms of carbohydrates. It is found in many grains, vegetables, and fruit. Our parents used to call it "bulk" or "roughage."

4. Why aren't proteins a major energy source? Proteins are primarily used for the growth and maintenance of the body, and secondarily as a source of energy. Carbohydrates and fats are used mainly for energy. Your body prefers not to use protein as a source of energy. But, if you don't have enough carbohydrates or fats in your diet, you must burn protein for energy instead of using it for building body cells.

5. Why should you get more of your energy from carbohydrate foods instead of fatty foods? Many of us are overweight, which isn't healthy. This is because we eat more than we need to keep our bodies functioning and to provide the necessary energy for activity. Those extra calories are often the result of too much fat in our diet.

Carbohydrates are a much better source of energy, since they have less than half the calories of fat, and carbohydrate foods often contain more nutritional pluses in the form of vitamins, minerals and fiber.

6. Can you actually lose weight and still eat starchy carbohydrate foods? Yes! If you cut back your fat intake and substitute some carbohydrates instead, you'll cut calories substantially. And many carbohydrate foods provide considerable bulk, which can help make you feel full as you leave the table.

U.S. Dietary Guidelines

4 Eat Foods with Adequate Starch and Fiber

The major sources of energy in the average U.S. diet are carbohydrates and fats. (Proteins and alcohol also supply energy, but to a lesser extent.) If you limit your fat intake, you should increase your calories from carbohydrates to supply your body's energy needs.

In trying to reduce your weight to "ideal" levels, carbohydrates have an advantage over fats. Carbohydrates contain less than half the number of calories per ounce than fats.

Complex carbohydrate foods are better than simple carbohydrates in this regard. Simple carbohydrates—such as sugars—provide calories but little else in the way of nutrients.

Complex carbohydrate foods—such as beans, peas, nuts, seeds, fruits and vegetables, and whole grain breads, cereals, and products—contain many essential nutrients in addition to calories.

Increasing your consumption of certain complex carbohydrates can also help increase dietary fiber. The average American diet is relatively low in fiber. Eating more foods high in fiber tends to reduce the symptoms of chronic constipation, diverticulosis, and some types of "irritable bowel."

There is also concern that low fiber diets might increase the risk of developing cancer of the colon, but whether this is true is not yet known.

To make sure you get enough fiber in your diet, you should eat fruits and vegetables, whole grain breads and cereals. There is no reason to add fiber to foods that do not already contain it.

To eat more complex carbohydrates daily

- Substitute starches for fats and sugars
- Select foods which are good sources of fiber and starch, such as whole grain breads and cereals, fruits and vegetables, beans, peas, and nuts

7. What are the different types of carbohydrates? There are two: simple and complex. Each is found in a wide variety of foods, which usually contain other nutrients. Sugar is called a simple carbohydrate and is easily digested. Starch is a complex carbohydrate that your body must then break down into simple carbohydrates. Fiber, which is one form of complex carbohydrate, is much harder to digest.

8. Do sugars provide little in the way of nutrients? The Guideline advises you to put more carbohydrates in your diet. However, the Guideline neglects to point out that simple carbohydrates, such as sugars, are usually consumed as part of other carbohydrate foods like fruits, vegetables and grain products which provide many important nutrients essential to your diet.

There is no need to avoid foods in which simple sugars are present. Go right ahead and eat those oranges and apples! And that breakfast cereal! And those oatmeal cookies. But be sure they are part of a balanced selection of foods.

9. What carbohydrate foods are particularly nutritious? Foods that contain carbohydrates are often good sources of other nutrients. For instance, one cup of cooked navy beans has 23% of the protein, 28% of the iron, 18% of the thiamine, and 28% of the calcium you need every day, according to the U.S. Recommended Daily Allowance.

It's a pity that nature doesn't print a label on starchy foods to show their nutrition pedigree. Fortunately, most packaged carbohydrate products are labeled. Read a bread label or a spaghetti or cereal box sometime for a pleasant surprise in nutrient riches.

10. What does dietary fiber do? It provides bulk to move waste through your digestive system faster.

11. What foods are high in fiber? Broccoli, brussel sprouts, peppers, beans and many other vegetables, whole grains and cereals are high in fiber as well as other nutrients. Fruits are also high in fiber and nutrients. Enriched pasta is high in nutrients but low in fiber. For balance in your diet, you need to eat many kinds of carbohydrate.

12. Should you add fiber supplements to foods? This Guideline recommends that if you eat enough high-fiber foods, there is no need to dose yourself with extra fiber. Don't overdo it!

General Foods urges you to study the U.S. Dietary Guidelines