



Low Carbohydrate diet

A low carbohydrate diet is defined as eating less than 130g of carbohydrate per day. Carbohydrate breaks down to glucose in the body, so it is the nutrient that has the biggest impact on your blood glucose levels. Lowering blood glucose levels is clearly a benefit for people with diabetes or those at risk of developing it.

The role of carbohydrates

Carbohydrate provides us with energy as it is broken down in the body to glucose where it is then released into the bloodstream. Insulin is the hormone produced by the pancreas that lowers our blood glucose levels by allowing the glucose to enter the cells so it can be used as fuel by our body for energy.

Healthy sources of carbohydrates, such as higher fibre starchy foods, vegetables, fruit and legumes, are also an important source of nutrients, such as calcium, iron and B vitamins which are all needed to keep us healthy.

One of the main benefits of following a low carb diet is weight loss. For people with type 2 diabetes, this helps to reduce HbA1c and blood fats such as cholesterol.



Types of carbohydrate

Carbohydrates are found in two main forms: starch and sugar.



Starchy carbohydrates

Includes foods such as potatoes, bread, rice, pasta, cous cous, breakfast cereals, oats and other grains like rye and barley.



Sugary carbohydrates

Includes foods such as honey, syrup, fruit juice, sweets, cakes and biscuits.

What can I eat?

Typically a low carb diet will include foods such as:



Eggs: Are very low carb and high in protein and other nutrients.



Fish: White fish such as haddock or cod & oily fish like salmon, mackerel and sardines.



Fruit & vegetables: Increase your vegetable intake as they are low in carbs and stick to lower sugar fruit such as berries.



Lean meats: Choose meats such as skinless chicken, turkey and pork and beef with visible fat trimmed off



Nuts & seeds: Provide our body with a range of vitamins, minerals and healthy fats.



Dairy: You can eat full fat dairy such as whole milk, plain yoghurts, such as greek yoghurt, and cheese.

What food should I avoid?

If you want to follow a low carb diet then you should avoid foods such as:



Sugar: This includes simple sugars such as honey, table sugar and any foods containing added sugar such as sweets, chocolates, ice cream, biscuits.



Bread, grains and pasta: All carbs will break down to glucose in the body so avoid foods made from wheat, rice and barley including bread, pasta and cereal.



Processed foods: Foods such as pies, crisps, hot dogs, sausages, fast foods, pizzas and takeaways are generally high in saturated fat, sugar and salt and offer no nutritive value.



Starchy vegetables: These are defined as those that grow under the ground such as sweet potatoes, carrots, parsnips, beetroot and potatoes.



Tips to reduce your carb intake

At home

- Swap rice for cauliflower, broccoli cous cous or grains such as quinoa or bulgar wheat.
- Make sure that any carbs you eat are high in fibre such as wholegrains.
- Cooking from scratch is the best way to control the carb content of meals.
- Instead of spaghetti, use spiralised veg such as courgetti or butternut squash noodles.
- Replace tortilla wraps or taco shells with lettuce leaves.
- Replace pasta sheets in lasagne with sliced aubergine.
- Use portobello mushrooms as the bun when you're having a burger.
- Substitute potatoes with more veg or try celeriac mash or butternut squash wedges.
- Replace wheat flours to low carb ones made from nuts such as almond flour or coconut flour. Both work well in recipes for muffins, pancakes or baked goods.
- Milk from cows is actually quite high in carbs due to the sugar lactose so try coconut or almond milk.
- For snacks choose lower carb options such as olives, nuts, cheese or tomatoes.
- Replace sugary desserts with berries and cream.

Eating out

- If you're having a burger, ditch the bun.
- Instead of chips or potatoes on the side, ask for extra veg or a side salad.
- Wine and lagers contain a lot of carbs so stick to clear spirits with diet mixers.
- Sauces can contain a lot of hidden sugar so ask for these on the side and you can control how much you use.
- For vegetarian options, choose meals with tofu, beans, vegetables and salad.



One of the best weight loss tips is to keep a food diary so you can monitor what you're eating - apps such as MyFitnessPal are great and will let you set targets and give you a full nutritional breakdown of what you're eating.



Preparation is key to any diet so it's a good idea to plan out your meals and snacks for the week. If you've got all of the ingredients you need and low carb snacks to hand then you'll find sticking to it a lot easier.

Food labels

When looking at food labels, you will be looking at the 'total grams of carbohydrate per serving' which is usually on the back of the food packaging.

BE AWARE!

When you cut back on carbs, you may develop withdrawal effects around days 2 - 4, which can include headaches, lethargy, nausea, confusion, loss of concentration or irritability. These usually disappear again within the week, following which people often experience increased energy levels.

