

# UNDERSTANDING CARBOHYDRATES: SIMPLE v. COMPLEX

by brantley black

During exercise, your muscles need a continuous supply of energy from carbohydrates, proteins, and fats. The intensity and duration of the activity determine predominantly which macronutrient is burned, but carbohydrates are the primary source of energy for the muscles. Our muscles need a steady supply of carbohydrates, in the basic form of glucose, to contract. Carbohydrates also help spare muscle protein from being used as energy; to metabolize fat efficiently, some carbohydrate is needed.

Today's fad diets encourage the elimination of carbohydrates. A healthier path is to understand that not all carbohydrates are created equal; keep carbohydrates in your meal plan, but choose wisely.

Carbohydrates are classified or named by their chemical structure. In general, most professionals refer to carbohydrates as either simple, meaning one or two molecules, or complex, for the long-chain polymers. Simple carbohydrates are usually sugars or sweeteners and complex carbohydrates are starches or fibers. A healthy meal plan would obtain the majority of its carbohydrates from fruits and vegetables and whole-grain breads and cereals and lean dairy products. Carbohydrates should supply about 40% of your total daily calories. That number could increase up to 70% if you are a marathon runner.

The general public tends to overeat when consuming starches and fibers. The most accurate way to prevent overeating is to weigh your food. Buy a food scale and measure out three ounces of cooked brown rice. Look at it! Remember what three ounces looks like and you will always know the proper portion size for cooked brown rice. After about two weeks of measuring all of your foods, you should hit just about everything in your meal plan.

Carbohydrates are a healthy and necessary part of a balanced meal plan. Choose wisely, eat proper portions, and enjoy!

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