

Carbohydrate portion sizes in pregnancy

Department of Nutrition and Dietetics

Introduction

This leaflet gives you information about carbohydrates and the recommended portion sizes for women with diabetes during their pregnancy.

What are carbohydrates?

Carbohydrates are a macronutrient; one of the basic food groups. When carbohydrates are eaten, they are broken down into glucose molecules, also referred to as sugar molecules, in our body. Carbohydrates can cause blood glucose levels to rise. We need insulin to take these glucose molecules into our body's cells, where we can use them for energy.

How much carbohydrate should I eat?

You should aim to have 3 main meals each day with around a fist-size portion (or 30g to 45g) of starchy carbohydrate.

You may find that you need to reduce your breakfast carbohydrate portion to 15g to 20g to keep your blood glucose levels within the target range. If this is the case, it is best to avoid breakfast cereals as most are high glycaemic index carbohydrates.

Be mindful of portion sizes and carbohydrate content of different brands. To find out the amount of carbohydrate in a product look at the 'Total Carbohydrate' on the packaging. You may need to work out the amount per portion.

Try to choose wholemeal (high fibre) starchy carbohydrate options where possible.

Reference No.

GHPI1637_06_24

Department

Diabetes

Review due

June 2027

**Patient
Information**

Which foods contain carbohydrates?

The term carbohydrate includes 2 different types of carbohydrates. One is simple or “sugary” carbohydrates and the other is complex or “starchy” carbohydrates.

You also need to consider the fat content and processing status of the food to help you make the best choice for you.

Sugary carbohydrates

Types	Examples
Foods containing natural sugars	Fruit (fresh, dried, frozen or tinned), milk, yoghurt, custard
Sugary foods/foods with added sugars	Table sugar, syrup, honey, treacle, jam, marmalade, cakes, biscuits, pastries, chocolates, ice-cream, sweets
Sugary drinks with added sugars	Fruit juice, smoothies, cola, lemonade, energy drinks, Lucozade original.

Starchy carbohydrates

Types	Examples
Potato and starchy vegetables	Sweet potato, plantain, yam
Pasta	Fresh, dried, tinned, noodles
Bread	White, wholemeal, granary, chapatti, naan, pitta, ciabatta
Rice	White, brown, basmati, risotto
Breakfast cereals	Cornflakes, rice crispies, muesli, porridge, bran flakes
Grains	Cous-cous, barley, semolina, cornmeal
Savoury pastry	Pies, sausage rolls, Cornish pasties. These are classed as processed foods
Flour products	Pancakes, Yorkshire puddings
Savoury snacks	Crisps, nachos, tortilla chips, pretzels, rice cakes, poppadom's, crackers, crisp breads, bread sticks
Breaded and battered foods	Fish fingers, scotch eggs, battered fish

Carbohydrate content of some foods

Breakfast cereals

Porridge (semi-skimmed milk)
27g oats

WEIGHT SERVINGS

220g - 1 + + Diary

NUTRITION FOR 1 SERVING OF 220g

27g Carbs	185 Cals	10g Prot	5g Fat
-----------	----------	----------	--------

Bran Flakes

WEIGHT SERVINGS

45g - 1 + + Diary

NUTRITION FOR 1 SERVING OF 45g

29g Carbs	161 Cals	5g Prot	1g Fat
-----------	----------	---------	--------

Note: Milk also contains carbohydrate. Consider the amount you add to cereal.

Bread, pasta, rice and potatoes

Sliced Bread (granary)
medium slice

WEIGHT SERVINGS

33g - 1 + + Diary

NUTRITION FOR 1 SERVING OF 33g

15g Carbs	78 Cals	3g Prot	1g Fat
-----------	---------	---------	--------

Tortilla (wholemeal)

WEIGHT SERVINGS

65g - 1 + + Diary

NUTRITION FOR 1 SERVING OF 65g

29g Carbs	177 Cals	6g Prot	3g Fat
-----------	----------	---------	--------

Patient Information

Bread, pasta, rice and potatoes cont.



Chapati (large, without fat)

WEIGHT SERVINGS

60g - 1 + + Diary

NUTRITION FOR 1 SERVING OF 60g

26g Carbs 121 Cals 4g Prot 1g Fat



Basmati Rice

WEIGHT SERVINGS

96g - 1 + + Diary

NUTRITION FOR 1 SERVING OF 96g

30g Carbs 137 Cals 3g Prot 1g Fat



Pasta Shells

WEIGHT SERVINGS

88g - 1 + + Diary

NUTRITION FOR 1 SERVING OF 88g

30g Carbs 147 Cals 5g Prot 1g Fat



Egg Noodles (medium)

WEIGHT SERVINGS

150g - 1 + + Diary

NUTRITION FOR 1 SERVING OF 150g

39g Carbs 196 Cals 7g Prot 1g Fat



New Potatoes (boiled)

WEIGHT SERVINGS

195g - 1 + + Diary

NUTRITION FOR 1 SERVING OF 195g

29g Carbs 133 Cals 4g Prot 0g Fat



Jacket Potato (baked)

WEIGHT SERVINGS

160g - 1 + + Diary

NUTRITION FOR 1 SERVING OF 160g

34g Carbs 147 Cals 4g Prot 0g Fat

Patient Information

Bread, pasta, rice and potatoes cont.



Sweet Potato (baked)

WEIGHT SERVINGS
 160g - 1 + + Diary

NUTRITION FOR 1 SERVING OF 160g

45g Carbs 184 Cals 3g Prot 1g Fat



Caribbean Dumplings (small)

WEIGHT SERVINGS
 120g - 1 + + Diary

NUTRITION FOR 1 SERVING OF 120g

46g Carbs 298 Cals 5g Prot 12g Fat

Example meals



Spaghetti Bolognese

120g spag, 180g bolognese

WEIGHT SERVINGS
 300g - 1 + + Diary

NUTRITION FOR 1 SERVING OF 300g

45g Carbs 307 Cals 15g Prot 9g Fat



Chicken Stir-fry (with noodles)

WEIGHT SERVINGS
 275g - 1 + + Diary

NUTRITION FOR 1 SERVING OF 275g

43g Carbs 329 Cals 29g Prot 5g Fat

Patient Information

Example meals cont.

Beans on Toast (with butter)
33g bread, 130g beans, 5g butter

WEIGHT: 157g | SERVINGS: 1 | + Diary

NUTRITION FOR 1 SERVING OF 157g

35g Carbs	215 Cals	9g Prot	5g Fat
-----------	----------	---------	--------

Lentil Curry with Brown Rice
185g curry, 95g rice

WEIGHT: 280g | SERVINGS: 1 | + Diary

NUTRITION FOR 1 SERVING OF 280g

47g Carbs	390 Cals	12g Prot	19g Fat
-----------	----------	----------	---------

Shepherd's Pie

WEIGHT: 360g | SERVINGS: 1 | + Diary

NUTRITION FOR 1 SERVING OF 360g

38g Carbs	527 Cals	24g Prot	32g Fat
-----------	----------	----------	---------

Tarka Dal, Chapati, Veg & Salad
175g curry, 25g chapati, 125g veg, 100g salad

WEIGHT: 425g | SERVINGS: 1 | + Diary

NUTRITION FOR 1 SERVING OF 425g

45g Carbs	380 Cals	15g Prot	17g Fat
-----------	----------	----------	---------

Chicken Curry, Rice & Salad
175g curry, 100g rice, 100g salad

WEIGHT: 375g | SERVINGS: 1 | + Diary

NUTRITION FOR 1 SERVING OF 375g

39g Carbs	409 Cals	15g Prot	22g Fat
-----------	----------	----------	---------

Fried Fish, Greens, Rice & Peas
100g fish, 100g greens, 100g rice & peas

WEIGHT: 300g | SERVINGS: 1 | + Diary

NUTRITION FOR 1 SERVING OF 300g

37g Carbs	448 Cals	21g Prot	25g Fat
-----------	----------	----------	---------

**Patient
Information**

Lower carbohydrate food ideas

Breakfast

- Eggs (boiled/scrambled/poached/omelette) on 1 to 2 slices of seeded/wholegrain toast*.
- Avocado on 1 to 2 slices of seeded/wholegrain toast*.
- Cold meats/cheeses with snack size croissant (only occasionally as high in fat).
- Low fat Greek yogurt with handful blueberries/raspberries/strawberries.
- Porridge oats (jumbo)/All bran with semi skimmed milk.
- Low fat cream cheese on half a bagel or a crumpet.



*You could also try sourdough bread, rye bread, and pumpernickel bread (mix of sourdough and rye).

Main meals

- Aim for no more than a fist-sized portion of starchy carbohydrates; such as bread, chappati, potato, pasta, rice or noodles.
- Try slower releasing (low GI) carbohydrates such as basmati rice, wholemeal pasta, sweet potato, new potatoes, buckwheat, quinoa etc.
- Aim for half of your plate to be filled with salad / vegetables; such as lettuce, cucumber, tomatoes, broccoli, green beans, carrots, peas etc.
- Try courgette or squash noodles to help increase your vegetable intake and reduce your carbohydrate portions.
- Add beans and lentils to meals such as bolognaise, stews, casseroles.

Patient Information

What about snacks?

Choose low carbohydrate snacks in-between meals. Aim for no more than 10g to 15g of carbohydrate. They should have little or no effect on your blood glucose levels.

Snacks

- “High protein” yoghurt for example, 15+g protein per serving (100 to 200g).
- 1 portion of fruit at a time, spread out across the day (1 portion = 1 apple/small banana/40g berries).
- Small handful (20g) of unsalted nuts (cashews, almonds, walnuts etc) or seeds.
- 1 to 2 oatcakes / crispbreads / Ryvita / plain ricecake.
- Peanut butter or low fat cheese spread on 1 to 2 oatcakes / crispbread / rice cake or on 1 slice of seeded / wholegrain toast.
- Olives and feta cheese with cherry tomatoes.
- Hummus / sour cream / cottage cheese / nut butter with carrot, cucumber and celery sticks.
- Cold meats.
- Hardboiled eggs.
- Plain popcorn.
- Cottage cheese / quark.
- Tinned fish on 1 slice toast.
- Cup of vegetable soup (check carbohydrate content)
- Mozzarella and tomato.
- Tofu.



Puddings (small portions)

- A portion of fruit - either fresh, stewed without sugar or canned in natural juice.
- Low fat natural/Greek style yoghurt with a portion of fruit.
- Sugar free ice lollies (or make your own with sugar free squash).
- Sugar-free custard, sugar-free milk pudding, sugar-free jelly.
- Sugar-free dessert mixes, yoghurt or fromage frais.
- Instant hot chocolate made with water.

Patient Information

Other tips

- Choose low fat versions of dairy products and lean protein sources (fish, beans, pulses, lentils, skinless meats such as chicken or turkey, and low-fat meat such as 5% fat minced meat).
- Bulk up your meals with vegetables/salad and lean proteins to avoid feeling hungry.
- Avoid eating carbohydrates late at night. Aim to have your evening meal before 7:30 pm.
- Insulin resistance typically increases in the morning **and** as your pregnancy progresses. You may need to reduce your carbohydrate portion size, particularly for breakfast, as you progress through your pregnancy. Please be reassured that this is fairly common.
- Continue to follow food safety advice during pregnancy.

Contact information

Department of Nutrition and Dietetics

Gloucestershire Royal Hospital
Great Western Road
Gloucester
GL1 3NN

Tel: 0300 422 5506

Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 4:30pm

Content reviewed: June 2024

Images on pages 3 to 6 from the Carbs & Cals app

Website www.carbsandcals.com

YouTube [carbsandcals](https://www.youtube.com/carbsandcals)

Instagram [@carbsandcals](https://www.instagram.com/carbsandcals)

Making a choice

Shared Decision Making

If you are asked to make a choice, you may have lots of questions that you want to ask. You may also want to talk over your options with your family or friends. It can help to write a list of the questions you want answered and take it to your appointment.



Ask 3 Questions

To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions if you are asked to make a choice about your healthcare.

1. What are my options?
2. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?

These resources have been adapted with kind permission from the MAGIC Programme, supported by the Health Foundation

* Ask 3 Questions is based on Shepherd HL, et al. Three questions that patients can ask to improve the quality of information physicians give about treatment options: A cross-over trial. Patient Education and Counselling, 2011;84: 379-85



<https://aqua.nhs.uk/resources/shared-decision-making-case-studies/>