

Making (Good & Bad) Carbs Better

We're human—by definition imperfect—and none of us wants to eat a bland, boring diet, however healthful. It's possible to eat a wide variety of foods, even some “bad” carbohydrates, and still have a very healthy eating plan, says Terry Shintani, M.D., M.P.H. Here are several techniques to minimize the blood-sugar and insulin impact of your meals, adapted from Shintani's *The Good Carbohydrate Revolution*.

Pressure-Cook Grains to Help Reduce Their Impact on Blood Sugar

Research comparing the difference between methods of cooking indicates that pressure-cooking causes a decrease in the blood-sugar response to rice and other grains.

If You're Going to Eat Bad Carbs, Include Some Good Carbs, Too

In a given meal, good carbohydrates help neutralize the effect of bad carbohydrates by slowing their digestion and absorption. If you are going to eat foods that contain sugar, for example, eat them along with vegetables, fruit, whole grains, or legumes.

Include High-Fiber Foods or Soluble-Fiber Supplements

Fiber, especially soluble fiber, helps to slow the absorption rate of carbohydrates. This is why eating cooked whole oats (not instant oats) in the morning is a good idea. Adding oat bran or eating an all-bran cereal is also useful. There is some evidence that fiber supplements can also help slow the absorption of carbohydrates and help improve a total meal. The best fiber supplements are soluble fibers such as psyllium, guar gum, and locust-bean gum.

Add Acidic Foods (e.g. Lemon and Vinegar) to Help Slow the Absorption of Carbohydrates From Other Foods

Studies show that adding vinegar to a meal will help to reduce the glycemic response of the whole meal. In one study, four teaspoons of vinegar in a dressing reduced the blood-sugar response of a meal by as much as 30 percent. The same seems to hold true for lemon juice, so squeeze a fresh lemon onto a salad or into a glass of water.

Exercise to Help Control Blood Sugar and Maintain Healthy Insulin Levels

Exercise helps to control your blood sugar by burning some of the calories from carbohydrates in your body. It also helps to keep your insulin levels within a normal range.

Eat Smaller, More Frequent Meals or Snacks

Eating smaller, more frequent meals also helps maintain healthy insulin levels. Large numbers of calories eaten at one time can overwhelm your body's ability to handle the nutrients that you absorb. This may force your body to produce more insulin than it needs. An overproduction of insulin may trigger an undesirable cycle of fatigue and hunger and, over time, can increase your risk for a host of health problems, including heart disease and high blood pressure

Eat More Low-Calorie-Density Foods

Foods with a low calorie density help to fill up your stomach and make you feel satisfied so that you consume fewer calories. This will reduce your overall intake of carbohydrates and, in the long run, will also help you to control your weight.