

# The Carb Continuum

We are going to get out of the “all or none” principle with carbs. Stop worrying if they are “good” or “bad.”

Carbohydrates are a continuum:

From “better” (higher fiber, more nourishing, health-promoting) to “worse” (lower fiber, less nourishing, health-harming).

## Not all carbs are created equal.

- Some are more sugary than others.
- Some are much easier to overeat than others.
- Some trigger binge behaviors more than others.
- And some are great to eat at one time but not so great to eat at another.

What I want you to ask yourself is “how can I move along the carb continuum towards better carb choices?” Versus worrying about “good” and “bad” carbs.

How can you make a small change today to be just a little bit better tomorrow?

## Three Questions To Ask Yourself

When choosing carbs, consider three important factors:

- **Carb type:** What type of carb is it?
- **Carb amount:** How much should I eat?
- **Carb timing:** What’s the best time to eat this type?

If you're a nutrition beginner, focus on learning about carb type and amount. If you're more advanced, you can think about carb timing too.

## What Kind of Carb Is It?

Let’s divide all carbohydrates into three distinct categories, based on the amount of fiber and nutrients, and how quickly the carbohydrates break down when digested.

## CARB TYPE #1: HIGH-FIBER CARBS

These include:

- most vegetables
- most fruits
- legumes: beans, lentils, etc.

All of these carbs digest slowly (because of their high fiber content). They’re rich in vitamins, minerals, and phytonutrients, and generally, pretty good for you.

## CARB TYPE #2: STARCHY CARBS

These include:

- **sweet/starchy fruits:** bananas, plantains, fresh figs or dates
- **starchy tubers:** potatoes, sweet potatoes, taro, yuca
- **whole grain rice:** brown, wild, red rice
- **oats**
- **other whole grains,** e.g. quinoa, amaranth, buckwheat groats, corn, etc.
- **whole grain flour products:** e.g. whole grain breads and pastas, etc.

Like carb type #1, these foods are also generally higher in fiber and beneficial nutrients, and digest relatively slowly. While most of these foods are “healthier”, they’re all pretty dense sources of carbs.

For example: It would take 6 ½ cups of broccoli to match the carb content of 1 cup of quinoa. It would take 30 cups of raw spinach to match the carbs in one sweet potato.

That means you can accumulate carbs and calories more quickly when eating these starches.

(To be clear, **these aren’t “bad” carbs.**)

## CARB TYPE #3: REFINED SUGARY CARBS

These include “foods” like:

- **pastries** such as cakes, cupcakes, and muffins
- **cookies and bars** (including protein and nutrition bars)
- **sweets:** candies, chocolates...
- **sweet drinks:** fruit juices, soda, and other sweetened drinks (including drinks like gatorade)
- **dried fruits:** raisins, dried cranberries, banana chips, dried apricots...

...and pretty much anything that’s processed and comes frozen or in a box.

Processed carbohydrates have almost no fiber or beneficial nutrients. They digest and absorb quickly, which leads to a blood sugar rush and crash, insulin spikes, and potential rebound overeating. You don’t lose fat (or worse, you gain fat) if you eat these foods at the wrong times.

Remember, none of this means you are banned from these foods. It’s just important to know:

- what they do in the body
- how much we should eat of each type
- the best time to eat them

## How Much Should I Eat?

Keep it simple. More fiber and nutrients = larger portion. Less fiber, fewer nutrients = smaller portion.

- **Fiber-rich, non-starchy vegetables:** Eat to your heart’s content.
- **Legumes & beans:** About ½ fist.
- **Starchy carbs:** A small handful.
- **Refined sugary carbs:** Well, you probably won’t be eating a lot of those anyway.



*Starchy carb portion: 1 small handful.*

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## What's the Best Time To Eat It?

### Eat high-fiber carbs at every meal.

Vegetables are great to eat at every meal. They contain a lot of vitamins and other nutrients that help you feel full faster.

To help curb appetite, cut cravings, and manage blood sugar between meals, eating a small handful of legumes (beans or lentils) with one or two of your meals will help.



The fiber in beans and lentils will slow digestion, keep you much more satisfied between meals, and fight cravings as you start to follow this habit.

You can prepare your own beans, simply get the canned variety and drain them, or you can buy them sprouted. If you start sounding like a magical fruit machine (meaning you are a tooter!), try different kinds.

### Eat starchy carbs mostly after exercise.

Since starchy carbs contain more energy (calories) and carbs than their fiber-rich counterparts, save these types of foods for within a few hours after your workout.

Why you ask? After a hard workout your muscles are like big sponges that will soak up carbs and use those carbs efficiently to restore your muscles.



Eating starchy carbs like whole grains, bananas, or potatoes after your workout will help your body recover while keeping you lean.

At other times of the day, when your activity level is lower, your muscles won't be quite as receptive to the carbs, and they're more likely to be stored as body fat.

You may find that a *small* portion of starchy carbs (like, half a banana, a slice of sprouted-grain bread, or a cupped handful of oats) at breakfast also helps keep your energy constant throughout the day. Experiment and see what works for you.

Summarizing:

- Shrink your starchy carb portions.
- Eat them mostly after your workout.
- Also try a *small* portion at breakfast if that works for you.

### Eat refined sugary carbs only rarely.

These foods are pretty worthless to us. They don't nourish us or help us get healthier or leaner. They blast through our bodies, making us feel lousy and leaving garbage everywhere.

When eaten in excess, refined sugary carbs are possibly the worst contributors to diabetes, heart disease, and obesity. Leave them for very special occasions, like dessert after a fancy restaurant meal, or a slice of cake on your birthday. Then eat them *slowly* and enjoy them :)

Still, if you know you're going to eat some kind of refined, sugary carb, eat it within a few hours (2 or so) after your workout to help lessen the damage. Don't make this a regular habit though!

As always, I am not expecting you to make all the changes in the world right away with this one. Take some time and try to be better every day with this new habit.

Remember to continue following your previous habits, and by all means, SLOW down when you eat!