

# Total Carbohydrate

## What It Is

Carbohydrates are found primarily in **plant foods**; the exception is dairy products, which contain milk sugar (lactose). Total Carbohydrate on the Nutrition Facts label includes:

- **Dietary fiber** is a type of carbohydrate made up of many sugar molecules linked together in such a way that it cannot be easily digested in the small intestine. Dietary fiber can increase the frequency of bowel movements, lower blood glucose and cholesterol levels, and reduce calorie intake.
- **Total sugars** include sugars that are naturally present in food and **added sugars**, which include sugars that are added during the processing of foods (such as sucrose or dextrose), foods packaged as sweeteners (such as table sugar), sugars from syrups and honey, and sugars from concentrated fruit or vegetable juices. Sugars are the smallest type of carbohydrate and are easily digested and absorbed by the body.
- **Sugar alcohols** are a type of carbohydrate that chemically have characteristics of both sugars and alcohols but are not completely absorbed by the body—providing a sweet taste with fewer calories per gram than sugar.

## Where It Is Found

- **Dietary fiber** includes naturally occurring fibers in plants (such as beans, fruits, nuts, peas, vegetables, seeds, whole grains, and foods made with whole grain ingredients) and certain isolated or synthetic non-digestible carbohydrates added to food that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has determined have beneficial physiological effects to human health.
- **Total sugars** include sugars found naturally in foods such as dairy products, fruits, and vegetables and **added sugars** often found in foods such as baked goods, desserts, sugar-sweetened beverages, and sweets.
- **Sugar alcohols** are found naturally in small amounts in a variety of fruits and vegetables and are also commercially produced and added as reduced-calorie sweeteners to foods (such as chewing gum, baked goods, desserts, frostings, and sweets).

## What It Does

- Carbohydrates provide calories, or “energy,” for the body. Each gram of carbohydrate provides **4 calories**. The human body breaks down carbohydrates into glucose. Glucose in the blood (often referred to as blood sugar) is the primary energy source for the body’s cells, tissues, and organs (such as the brain and muscles). Glucose can be used immediately or stored in the liver and muscles for later use.

Nutrition Facts	
4 servings per container	
<b>Serving size 1 1/2 cup (208g)</b>	
<b>Amount per serving</b>	
<b>Calories</b>	<b>240</b>
<b>% Daily Value*</b>	
<b>Total Fat</b> 4g	<b>5%</b>
Saturated Fat 1.5g	<b>8%</b>
Trans Fat 0g	
<b>Cholesterol</b> 5mg	<b>2%</b>
<b>Sodium</b> 430mg	<b>19%</b>
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 46g	<b>17%</b>
Dietary Fiber 7g	<b>25%</b>
Total Sugars 4g	
Includes 2g Added Sugars	<b>4%</b>
<b>Protein</b> 11g	
Vitamin D 2mcg	10%
Calcium 260mg	20%
Iron 6mg	35%
Potassium 240mg	6%
* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.	



## Health Facts

- Most Americans exceed the recommended limits for added sugars in the diet. There is evidence that diets characterized, in part, by lower consumption of sugar-sweetened foods and beverages relative to less healthy dietary patterns are associated with a **reduced risk of developing cardiovascular disease**. Diets higher in all sugars can also **increase the risk of developing cavities**. The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommend limiting calories from added sugars to less than 10% of total calories per day (e.g., 200 calories or 50 grams per day of added sugars based on a 2,000 calorie daily diet).
- Many Americans also do not get the recommended amount of dietary fiber. Diets higher in dietary fiber can **increase the frequency of bowel movements and can reduce the risk of developing cardiovascular disease**. The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommend consuming a variety of foods that are good sources of dietary fiber, consuming **at least half of grains as whole grains**, and limiting the intake of refined grains and products made with refined grains.

## ✓ Action Steps

### For Monitoring Total Carbohydrate in Your Diet

Use the **Nutrition Facts** label as a tool for monitoring consumption of total carbohydrate. The Nutrition Facts label on food and beverage packages shows the amount in grams (g) of total carbohydrate and the % Daily Value (%DV) of total carbohydrate per serving of the food.

The Nutrition Facts label also lists the types of carbohydrate that make up the total carbohydrate in a product. This includes the amount in grams (g) per serving of dietary fiber, total sugars, and added sugars; as well as the %DV of dietary fiber and added sugars. Food manufacturers may also *voluntarily* list the amount in grams (g) per serving of soluble dietary fiber, insoluble dietary fiber, and sugar alcohols.

**The Daily Value for total carbohydrate is 275 g per day.** This is based on a 2,000 calorie daily diet—your Daily Value may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

- When comparing and choosing foods, look at the %DV of total carbohydrate. And remember:
  - 5% DV or less of total carbohydrate per serving is considered low
  - 20% DV or more of total carbohydrate per serving is considered high
- Try whole grains (such as brown rice, bulgur, couscous, and quinoa) as side dishes and switch from refined to whole grain versions of commonly consumed foods (such as breads, cereals, pasta, and rice). Also, look for options that are lower in added sugars, saturated fats, and/or sodium, such as: bread instead of croissants; English muffins instead of biscuits; and plain popcorn instead of buttered.
- Choose whole fruit (fresh, frozen, dried, and canned in 100% fruit juice) as snacks and desserts and use fruit to top foods like cereal, yogurt, oatmeal, and pancakes.
- Keep raw, cut-up vegetables handy for quick snacks—choose colorful dark green, orange, and red vegetables (such as broccoli florets, carrots, and red peppers).
- Add beans and peas or unsalted nuts and seeds to salads, soups, and side dishes. These are also great sources of dietary fiber and protein.
- Try unsweetened or no-sugar added versions of fruit sauces (such as applesauce) and plain, fat-free or 1% low-fat yogurt.
- More often, choose beverages such as water and fat-free or 1% low-fat milk. Less often, choose beverages that are high in calories but have few or no beneficial nutrients, such as energy drinks, fruit drinks, soft drinks, and sports drinks.
- Consume smaller portions of foods and beverages that are higher in added sugars or consume them less often.