

Diabetes Management: Counting Carbohydrate Choices

When you have diabetes, carb counting can help you manage your blood sugar while still enjoying a variety of foods.

There are two common methods used to count carbs: Counting carb grams, and Counting carb choices.

No matter which method you use, you and your diabetes care team will work together to decide how many carbs you can have at each meal and snack. You will also have a total for the day.

First, let's talk about the gram counting method. Carbohydrate is measured in grams.

So one way to count carbs is to count the total number of carbohydrate grams in your meals and snacks.

For example, a healthy breakfast may include a 1/2 cup of rolled oats with 1/4 cup chopped walnuts, 1 cup of low-fat milk, and two-thirds of a medium banana.

This meal has a total of 65 grams of carbohydrate.

At the end of the day, compare the total number of carbs you ate for each meal to your meal plan to make sure you are staying in a healthy range.

When using the choice counting method, you will learn to count foods in portion sizes equal to 15 grams of carbohydrate.

15 grams of carbs is considered one carb serving or "choice." This value isn't always the same as a typical serving of food.

For example, most people would consider a large banana one serving. But since one large banana has about 30 grams of carbs, it would count as two carb choices.

With practice, you'll learn the carb value of common foods so you can decide whether they fit into your meal plan.

Several resources can help you with carb counting. All pre-packaged foods come with a food label. It lists the total carbohydrate per serving size.

When the food label is not handy, try websites like calorieking.com or smartphone apps such as MyFitnessPal.

"Just using my phone...And it will tell me or if I go to a restaurant, a chain restaurant, ask how many carbohydrates are in the entrees that I'm going to get."

You can also quickly find the carbohydrate values of foods from cookbooks, handouts from your dietitian, ADA exchange lists, and nutrition books.

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Consider keeping a list of the common foods you eat and their carb choice values for easy reference.

“If there's a meal that I eat regularly, then I have a little piece of paper that will say, okay, you know, this has this many carbs.”

Learning to recognize foods in 15 gram servings is a valuable skill you will use every day. But not everything you choose to eat will come in perfect 15 gram amounts.

You may need to round the value up or down. For example, a food that has 13 grams of carbs should be counted as one carb choice, since 13 is so close to 15 grams.

And a food with 33 grams of carbs should be counted as two carb choices, since 33 is so close to 30 grams.

In cases where the value falls more in the middle, round to the nearest half choice.

For example, a food with 23 grams of carbs would be counted as one and a half carb choices, since 23 isn't close to 15 or 30.

Some foods contain as little as 5 grams of carbohydrate.

One cup of raw or $\frac{1}{2}$ a cup of cooked non-starchy vegetables like carrots, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, spinach, or zucchini all have about 5 grams of carbs.

These can be counted as zero choices.

You may feel overwhelmed at first by carb counting. But it will get easier. With a little time and practice, you'll be able to recognize carbohydrate foods and typical portions.

Counting carb grams or choices will start to come naturally.