

Diabetes Management: Using the Food Label for Carbohydrate Counting

The Nutrition Facts label is an easy and handy tool you can use to count carbs.

All pre-packaged foods and even some non-packaged foods have a Nutrition Facts label. It has a lot of information, including: the serving size, calories per serving, types of fat in the food item, and the amounts of carbohydrate and fiber.

When carb counting, look at the serving size first. All values on the Nutrition Facts label are based on the serving size.

Next, look at the total carbohydrate listed.

Take note though, you may eat more or less of some foods than the serving size shown on the label.

To get an accurate idea of the true amount of carb you are eating, you need to count the carbs in your portion size.

For example, a serving size of cooked rice is 1/3 of a cup and has 15 grams of carbohydrate per the Nutrition Facts label.

But when you measure the amount served at this meal, it is closer to 1 cup. That means this portion of rice is 45 grams of carbohydrate.

That will make a big difference in how high your blood sugar will rise.

Get in the habit of reading the Nutrition Facts label because even the same types of food can have different amounts of carbohydrate.

One type of yogurt, for example, may have fewer carbs than another.

But...are all carbs created equal? The answer is yes and no. All carbohydrates affect your blood sugar the same way.

Once the carb is broken down into glucose (or sugar), your body doesn't know whether that glucose came from a banana or a cupcake.

But there are different types of carbohydrates that have unique effects on our health.

For example, fiber is a type of carbohydrate that is an important part of a healthy diet for everyone...not just people with diabetes, and many people don't get enough.

Fiber improves digestion and gut health, lowers your risk of heart disease, and helps you feel full longer. So choosing foods that are high in fiber can be a healthy carbohydrate option.

Diabetes experts agree that total carbohydrate is the most important information for counting carbs.

But you may be told to consider total sugars or fiber as well.

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Talk to your diabetes care team about how to correctly count carbs in the foods you choose.

“Another thing was that my endocrinologist says, Hey, anything going in your mouth needs to be accounted for.”

The Nutrition Facts label has a lot of information and can be a useful tool when carb counting.

Remember to look at the serving size and total carbohydrate when making food choices.