

## Carbs: A Double-Edged Sword

A normal person who eats without any restraint or health goals, gets roughly 65-80% of their total calories from just carbohydrates! That's too much and it's causing a few too many issues from simple weight gain to more complicated health issues such as high triglycerides, elevated blood sugar, insulin resistance and more.

Obviously, we need to fix this and so we need to make a conscious effort to reduce the amount of carbohydrates we consume. We don't have to drastically reduce them to the point of feeling exhausted or give up carbohydrates completely and walk around with boards yelling "Carbs suck!". We just need to make an effort to not overload ourselves with a one nutrient while trivialising the others. How do we do that?

1. By reducing the amount of grains we eat. This is mostly rice (idly, dosa, aapam, idiyappam etc), wheat (roti, naan, chapathi, poori, bread, upma etc) or corn (breakfast cereals, snack bars etc) for most of us.
2. By reducing quantity and frequency of 'sweet things' in our lives. This will include everything that is sweet and everything you love - cakes, cookies, cereals, biscuits, ice creams, juices, honey, chocolates and more. I know what you're thinking but that "love" is making you over-consume them which will make you fat, sick or allergic to sugar (diabetic) eventually. So it's simpler and smarter to keep sugar well under control and enjoy the things you love for a long time to come.

But remember, when we remove or reduce grains and sugar from our diets, we are NOT depriving our bodies of carbohydrates. While it may seem like that at the superficial level, that's just a lack of proper understanding of nutrition talking. Carbohydrates are present in many of the foods we consume. And we are merely replacing foods that are extremely rich in carbs and poor in other nutrients with foods that are rich in many other nutrients (protein, vitamins, minerals) and contain enough carbohydrates.

While grains like rice, wheat and corn and sugars like table sugar, honey and jaggery are practically little pouches of carbohydrates, many other foods we consume regularly are rich in carbohydrates - milk, yogurt, lentils, beans, legumes, pulses, every single vegetable and fruit we consume and even nuts! Basically, eating no carbohydrates at all is close to impossible unless you eat nothing but eggs, meat, seafood, cheese, oil, butter and cream.

So instead of thinking in binary, look closer at the spectrum between too much and too little. Think "optimal".

If you are experiencing unplanned weight gain or have high triglycerides or blood sugar or are diabetic, reducing your overall carbohydrate (grains and sugar) load will do you good. But don't

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overthink or overdo it. Just eat lesser rice or fewer idlies and say no to dessert and other sweet things more often than you say yes. Fill the void created with an extra serving of vegetables, fruit, cheese, eggs, meat, milk, curd or daal. It's really that simple.

*Note:* This article was originally published in The Hindu MetroPlus