

# Carbohydrate portion sizes in pregnancy

#### Introduction

This leaflet gives you information about carbohydrates and the recommended portion sizes for women with diabetes during their pregnancy.

#### What are carbohydrates?

Carbohydrates are a macronutrient; one of the basic food groups. When carbohydrates are eaten, they are broken down into glucose molecules, also referred to as sugar molecules, in our body. Carbohydrates can cause blood glucose levels to rise. We need insulin to take these glucose molecules into our body's cells, where we can use them for energy.

#### How much carbohydrate should I eat?

You should aim to have 3 main meals each day with around a fist-size portion (or 30g to 45g) of starchy carbohydrate.

You may find that you need to reduce your breakfast carbohydrate portion to 15g to 20g to keep your blood glucose levels within the target range. If this is the case, it is best to avoid breakfast cereals as most are high glycaemic index carbohydrates.

Be mindful of portion sizes and carbohydrate content of different brands. To find out the amount of carbohydrate in a product look at the 'Total Carbohydrate' on the packaging. You may need to work out the amount per portion.

Try to choose wholemeal (high fibre) starchy carbohydrate options where possible.

Reference No.

GHPI1637 02 24

Department

Nutrition and Diabetes

Review due

February 2027

#### Which foods contain carbohydrates?

The term carbohydrate includes 2 different types of carbohydrates. One is simple or "sugary" carbohydrates and the other is complex or "starchy" carbohydrates.



You also need to consider the fat content and processing status of the food to help you make the best choice for you.

### **Sugary carbohydrates**

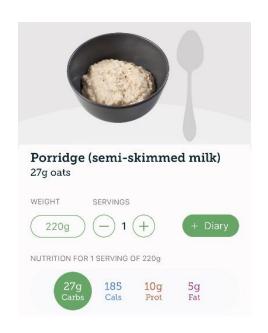
Types	Examples
Foods containing	Fruit (fresh, dried, frozen or tinned), milk,
natural sugars	yoghurt, custard
Sugary	Table sugar, syrup, honey, treacle, jam,
foods/foods with	marmalade, cakes, biscuits, pastries,
added sugars	chocolates, ice-cream, sweets
Sugary drinks with	Fruit juice, smoothies, cola, lemonade,
added sugars	energy drinks, Lucozade® original.

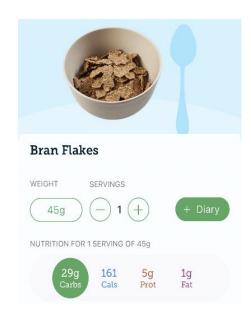
### Starchy carbohydrates

Types	Examples
Potato and	Sweet potato, plantain, yam
starchy	
vegetables	
Pasta	Fresh, dried, tinned, noodles
Bread	White, wholemeal, granary, chapatti, naan,
	pitta, ciabatta
Rice	White, brown, basmati, risotto
Breakfast cereals	Cornflakes, rice crispies, muesli, porridge,
	bran flakes
Grains	Cous-cous, barley, semolina, cornmeal
Savoury pastry	Pies, sausage rolls, Cornish pasties.
	These are classed as processed foods
Flour products	Pancakes, Yorkshire puddings
Savoury snacks	Crisps, nachos, tortilla chips, pretzels, rice
	cakes, poppadom's, crackers, crisp
	breads, bread sticks
Breaded and	Fish fingers, scotch eggs, battered fish
battered foods	



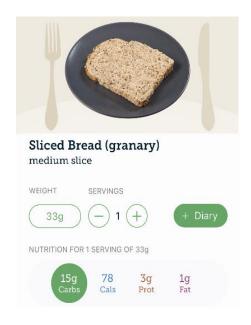
# Carbohydrate content of some foods Breakfast cereals

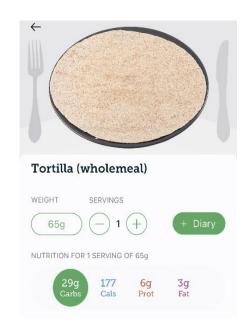




Note: Milk also contains carbohydrate. Consider the amount you add to cereal.

#### Bread, pasta, rice and potatoes

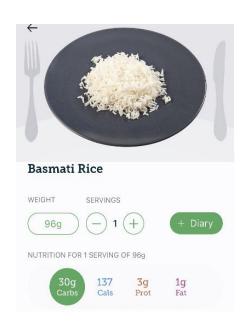


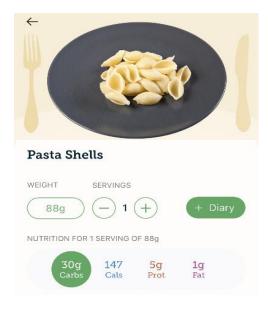




### Bread, pasta, rice and potatoes continued



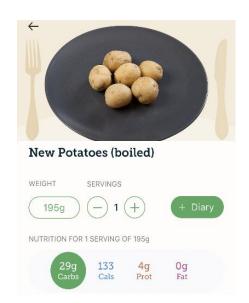


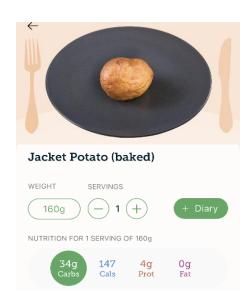


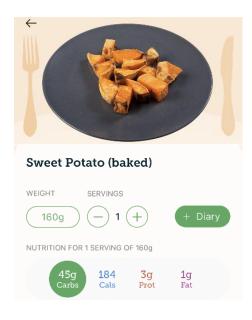




### Bread, pasta, rice and potatoes continued





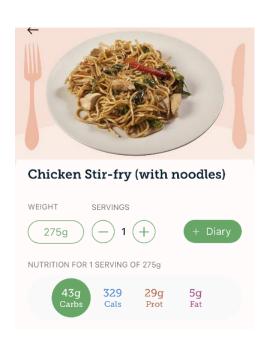


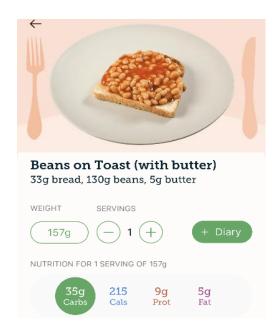




#### **Example meals**





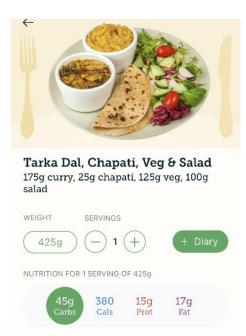


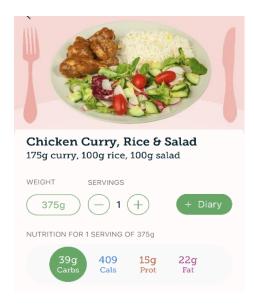


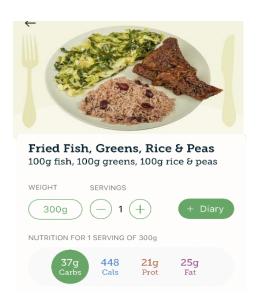


#### **Example meals continued**









#### Images from the Carbs & Cals app

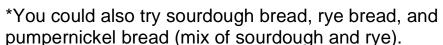
Website <a href="www.carbsandcals.com">www.carbsandcals.com</a>
YouTube carbsandcals
Instagram @carbsandcals



#### Lower carbohydrate food ideas

#### **Breakfast**

- Eggs (boiled/scrambled/poached/omelette) on 1 to 2 slices of seeded/wholegrain toast\*.
- Avocado or smoked salmon on 1 to 2 slices of seeded/wholegrain toast\*.
- Cold meats/cheeses with snack size croissant (only occasionally as high in fat).
- Low fat Greek yogurt with handful blueberries/raspberries/strawberries.
- Porridge oats (jumbo)/All bran with semi skimmed milk.
- Low fat cream cheese on half a bagel or a crumpet.







#### Main meals

- Aim for no more than a fist-sized portion of starchy carbohydrates; such as bread, chappati, potato, pasta, rice or noodles.
- Try slower releasing (low GI) carbohydrates such as basmati rice, wholemeal pasta, sweet potato, new potatoes, buckwheat, quinoa etc.
- Aim for half of your plate to be filled with salad / vegetables; such as lettuce, cucumber, tomatoes, broccoli, green beans, carrots, peas etc.
- Try courgette or squash noodles to help increase your vegetable intake and reduce your carbohydrate portions.
- Add beans and lentils to meals such as bolognaise, stews, casseroles.

#### What about snacks?

Choose low carbohydrate snacks in-between meals. Aim for no more than 10g to 15g of carbohydrate. They should have little or no effect on your blood glucose levels.



#### **Snacks**

- "High protein" yoghurt for example, 15+g protein per serving (100 to200g).
- 1 portion of fruit at a time, spread out across the day (1 portion = 1 apple/small banana/40g berries).
- Small handful (20g) of unsalted nuts (cashews, almonds, walnuts etc) or seeds.
- 1 to 2 oatcakes / crispbreads / Ryvita® / plain ricecake.
- Peanut butter or low-fat cheese spread on 1 to 2 oatcakes / crispbread / rice cake or on 1 slice of seeded / wholegrain toast.
- Olives and feta cheese with cherry tomatoes.
- Hummus / sour cream / cottage cheese / nut butter with carrot, cucumber and celery sticks.
- Cold meats.
- Hardboiled eggs.
- Plain popcorn.
- Cottage cheese / quark.
- Tinned fish on 1 slice toast.
- Cup of vegetable soup (check carbohydrate content)
- Mozzarella and tomato.
- Tofu / seafood sticks.

#### **Puddings (small portions)**

- A portion of fruit either fresh, stewed without sugar or canned in natural juice.
- Low fat natural/Greek style yoghurt with a portion of fruit.
- Sugar free ice lollies (or make your own with sugar free squash).
- Sugar-free custard, sugar-free milk pudding, sugar-free jelly.
- Sugar-free dessert mixes, yoghurt or fromage frais.
- Instant hot chocolate made with water.





#### Other tips

- Choose low fat versions of dairy products and lean protein sources (fish, beans, pulses, lentils, skinless meats such as chicken or turkey, and low-fat meat such as 5% fat minced meat).
- Bulk up your meals with vegetables/salad and lean proteins to avoid feeling hungry.
- Avoid eating carbohydrates late at night. Aim to have your evening meal before 7:30 pm.
- Insulin resistance typically increases in the morning and as your pregnancy progresses. You may need to reduce your carbohydrate portion size, particularly for breakfast, as you progress through your pregnancy. Please be reassured that this is fairly common.
- Continue to follow food safety advice during pregnancy.

#### **Contact information**

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### Making a choice

### **Shared Decision Making**

If you are asked to make a choice, you may have lots of questions that you want to ask. You may also want to talk over your options with your family or friends. It can help to write a list of the questions you want answered and take it to your appointment.



### **Ask 3 Questions**

To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions if you are asked to make a choice about your healthcare.

- 1. What are my options?
- 2. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?
- 3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right

rces have been adapted with kind permission from the MAGIC Programme, supported by the Health Foundation

\* Ask 3 Questions is based on Shepherd HL, et al. Three questions that patients can ask to improve the quality of information physicians give about tre Patient Education and Counselling, 2011;84: 379-85







AQUA https://aqua.nhs.uk/resources/shared-decision-making-case-studies/