

Children Need Carbohydrates

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Published September 15, 2014



In recent years, several diet fads have recommended the reduction, or even elimination, of carbohydrates from our usual diets. But are such "low carb" diets good for a child? While a reduction of certain types of carbohydrates may be beneficial for our children's growing bodies, removing all carbohydrates are not.

The preferred fuel for active brains and growing muscles, carbohydrates are a diverse nutrient group which includes cereal and milk, potatoes, peas, fruits and juice, noodles, applesauce, and soda.

Best Carbohydrate Choices

All carbohydrates provide calories; however, the best carbohydrate choices also provide vitamins, minerals and fiber. Examples of these nutrient-rich carbohydrates include whole-grain bread, pasta and cereal, brown rice, potatoes, fruit, peas, and beans.

Sweets and other sources of added sugars are better reserved for an occasional treat, since they don't offer nutrition beyond energy and sugar. These "occasional treats" include soda and other sweet drinks, candy, cakes, and cookies. Be mindful of surprising sources of added sugars including flavored yogurts, and sports drinks — the grams of sugar can quickly add up.

Low-fat and fat-free milk is a healthy drink with a naturally occurring form of carbohydrate called lactose. Chocolate and strawberry milk are a tasty treat, but contain added sugars. So, white milk is the best choice most days.

Gluten Intolerance

Gluten-free eating is not the goal for everyone, but for kids with gluten intolerance or celiac disease, all sources of gluten must be avoided. Gluten is found in wheat, rye and barley. Gluten-free products are becoming common in grocery stores and restaurants, making it easier to navigate these restrictions for individuals who must comply with gluten-free eating. Remember, cookies and cakes — even the gluten-free ones — are treats; they're not healthy choices simply because they are gluten-free.

Reaching Daily Fiber Needs

White bread, noodles and white rice are another group of foods that are sources of carbohydrates. But because they are refined, they are lower in fiber and other essential nutrients. Selecting whole grains is the healthier choice for you and your family. It is possible to find delicious whole grain crackers, bread, noodles, cereals, granola bars and tortillas.

Focusing on whole grains over refined grains and whole fruits instead of juice, plus vegetables, makes the children's goal for fiber an easy target.

Children 1 to 3 years: 19 grams fiber per day

Children 4 to 8 years: 24 grams fiber per day

Females 9 to 18 years: 26 grams fiber per day

Males 9 to 13 years: 31 grams fiber per day

Males 14 to 18 years: 38 grams fiber per day

Check the Nutrition Facts label for the amount of fiber per serving.