

What Are Two Classifications of Carbohydrates?

By Allen Smith, eHow User



Over the years, carbohydrates have received a bad rap when it comes to weight loss and healthy diet choices. As one of the principle food components (along with fats and protein), carbohydrates are essential for keeping your body running. The two types of carbohydrates, simple and complex, are good energy sources that play an important role in the immune system, blood clotting and normal body development.

Monosacharides and Polysacharides

At the most basic level, simple carbohydrates exist as monosacharides like glucose, lactose, galactose and fructose that are found in simple sugars, milk and fruit juice. They are easy to digest, readily available as quick fuel for the body and are the preferred fuel for the brain.

Monosacharides can also be bound to other monosacharides, to form polysacharides and classified as complex carbohydrates. Complex carbohydrates are present in a multitude of [foods](#) including baked goods and pasta. Because of their more complicated chemical structure, complex carbohydrates take longer to digest in the small intestine and are better sources of fuel for sustained activities.

Benefits

Carbohydrates are a good source of energy---necessary if you're going to embark on an [exercise](#) program in addition to making changes in your diet. The American Dietetic Association states that carbohydrates are also a great source of fiber. Fiber is important for keeping you regular and for lowering your risk for colon cancer.

Weight Loss

Carbohydrates are a focal point of many discussions of weight loss. Some diets, like the Atkins diet, reduce or eliminate carbohydrates because they are thought to be calorie dense. While there may be some truth to this, most registered dietitians will tell you that a balanced diet designed for sustained weight loss should always include some carbohydrates.

For those embarking on a weight loss program, dietitians recommend that your total daily carbohydrate intake be 50 percent or less of your total daily caloric intake. Wherever possible, emphasize complex carbohydrates over simple. Complex carbohydrates contain many vitamins and nutrients not typically found in simple sugars.

Carbohydrates and the Glycemic Index

Recently, simple and complex carbohydrates have been further scrutinized using an additional concept: glycemic index.

The glycemic index (GI) identifies how quickly the carbohydrates we consume raise our blood sugar levels. The higher the rating, the faster the food will cause high blood glucose levels. For instance, a baguette has a GI rating of 95. Sweet corn has a GI of 48. Sausages, which are principally fat and protein have a GI of 28. High GI carbohydrates cause large spikes in blood glucose levels. Low GI carbohydrates keep blood glucose levels even.

There is no direct [relationship](#) between simple and complex carbohydrates and their glycemic index. Those interested in managing their blood glucose levels by eating low GI foods need to learn the GI rating of their favorite foods.

Diabetics and anyone embarking on a weight loss program should pay close attention to the GI of the carbohydrates they eat.

How Simple and Complex Carbohydrates Fit Into Your Day

Regardless of which carbohydrates you consume---simple or complex---they are an important source of fiber and nutrients and play a role in a healthy diet. Learning which foods contain simple or complex carbohydrates, can help with diet planning. Try to avoid eating all simple or all complex carbohydrates at one sitting. Instead, choose foods that balance each other. Eating a serving of potatoes or brown rice, followed by fruit for dessert is a good way to enjoy both types.