

Chatting with The Good Dr. Laura Shook
June 2010

Technically speaking, carbohydrates are sugar compounds produced by plants when the plants are exposed to sunlight. This process of plants and sunshine making sugar is called Photosynthesis. We humans eat plants and use the sugar for energy. This is good, without energy from food we would die.

Not long ago “Low Carb” diets and weight loss programs gave carbohydrates sort of a bad reputation of being the evil food group. Fortunately, now-a-days most folks realize that it’s not so much the act of eating carbohydrates that challenges health but rather the volume and type of carbohydrate and how that food/carbohydrate has been processed, manipulated and modified. “Good Carbs” and “Bad Carbs” while not exactly accurate is one way of looking at the whole carbohydrate scene.

“Good Carbs” such as spinach, lettuce, celery, broccoli, chard and onions, all of these vegetables undergo the whole sunshine-photosynthesis process. In addition to carbohydrates these vegetables contain vitamins, minerals, fiber and plenty of water. This high water content makes it possible to pick and eat fresh produce from the garden. Vegetables are good for the body. It is hard to consume too many vegetables. Grains such as wheat, mature corn, oats, barley and rice contain less water therefore, ounce for ounce, their nutrient content is much denser than their vegetable cousins.. The low water, high fiber content of grains also makes them difficult for humans to chew. That is why we steam our rice, cook our oats and crush or grind our wheat softening or breaking the hard outside and making it possible to chew and access the nutrition rich insides of grains. Grains carry a powerful punch of nutrition and a little goes a long way. When eating grains it is easy to eat far too much. A serving of rice or pasta is ½ cup. A serving of bread is 1 slice. A serving of ready made cereal is 1 cup. The new food pyramid (www.mypyramid.gov) recommends only 3 servings of whole grains (not processed grains) each day.

Now a few words about “Bad Carbs”: Far too frequently grains are processed or refined removing the fiber and destroying much of the nutrient content leaving only the sugar part of the sugar compound. White flour, white bread and white rice will raise your blood sugar in a way similar to sugar. It may not kill you outright but consuming too many “Bad Carbs” contributes to obesity, diabetes, stroke and heart disease.

What is one to do? Eat veggies, veggies VEGGIES and when selecting bread or cereal read the labels looking for the words “whole grain” associated with the first ingredient. Or better yet bake your own bread using some of the locally grown, stone milled, certified organic whole grain, hard white winter wheat (white as in albino not bleached), such as, the kind grown and milled by the Janzen Family Farms in Newton.

Recommended reading: Artisan Bread in 5 Minutes a Day by Jeff Hertzberg MD and Zoe Francois. Photos by Mark Luinberg. This book has transformed our kitchen and dining experience.

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