

# Carbohydrates and Diabetes: What You Need to Know

An important part of managing your child's diabetes is to understand how carbohydrates affect diabetes. In this handout, you will learn about carbohydrates and how they can affect your child's diabetes.

## WHAT ARE CARBOHYDRATES?

**Carbohydrates** (also called **carbs**) are your body's main source of energy to walk, play and concentrate. You can find carbs in many types of food, like fruit, vegetables, whole grains and dairy products. You can also find carbs in foods that are less healthy, like sweets and baked goods.

## WHY ARE CARBS IMPORTANT FOR PEOPLE WITH DIABETES?

It is important for people with diabetes to eat a certain number of carbs at certain times throughout the day. This helps keep their blood sugar levels within a normal range. Eating too many carbs can cause high blood sugar levels. Not eating enough carbs can cause low blood sugar levels.

## HOW DOES THE BODY USE CARBS?

When a person without diabetes eats carbs, their bodies release a hormone called **insulin**. Insulin helps turn the carbs into **glucose** (a type of sugar) for their body to use as energy. digest them and break them down into sugar.

In people with **Type 1 diabetes**, the body does not make insulin. Instead, people can take insulin medication to help the body use carbs for energy.

In people with **Type 2 diabetes**, the body is resistant to insulin (does not use insulin properly). People can take medications to help their bodies use insulin and glucose properly. People might also need to take insulin.

## ARE THERE CERTAIN CARBS THAT CAN HELP MANAGE MY CHILD'S DIABETES BETTER THAN OTHERS?

Yes. Healthy carbs (like those in fruits, vegetables and whole grains) can help manage your child's diabetes.

Less healthy carbs (like those found in sweets, fried foods and baked goods) can cause blood sugar levels to become too high or too low. They can also cause extra weight gain, heart disease and other health concerns.

## WHO CAN HELP ME LEARN HOW TO COUNT CARBS AND MAKE A MEAL PLAN FOR MY CHILD?

A **registered dietitian** in Pediatric Endocrinology at MassGeneral Hospital for Children.

*To schedule an appointment with a registered dietitian or to ask questions, call Pediatric Endocrinology at 617-726-2909*