

Benefitting from quality carbohydrates

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AN eating plan that helps promote health and manage your weight includes a variety of healthy foods. Consuming food with different colours such as dark leafy greens, oranges, tomatoes and even fresh herbs will load your plate with vitamins, fibre, and minerals. Adding frozen peppers, broccoli or onions to stews and omelettes gives your meals a quick and convenient boost of colour and nutrients.

However, certain diets have a restricted carbohydrate intake as part of the diet plan which begs the question, is eating carbohydrates bad for our health?

According to dietitian Norul Emyshahida A. Majid at MSU Medical Centre, “There are three main types of carbohydrates which are starches, sugars, and fibres. Examples of starches are rice, tubers, beans and other grain products. Sugars can either naturally occur in foods such as milk and fruits or be added during food processes in the likes of cakes, cookies and soft drinks. Fibre is an undigestible part of plant food found in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes.”

Obtaining sufficient fuel for our bodies

Carbohydrates are the main source of energy for the human body. The recommended carbohydrate intake is 45–60% of total energy intake with an optimal proportion being 50–55%. The Malaysia Dietary Guidelines 2020 recommends eating adequate amounts of rice, other cereals, whole grain cerealbased products and tubers (three to five servings a day); eating plenty of vegetables and fruits every day (three servings of vegetables and two servings of fruits a day); consuming adequate amounts of milk and milk products (two servings a day); and limiting sugar intake in foods and beverages (not exceeding 50g sugar or 10 teaspoons a day).(1)

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Finding goodness in whole grains

Whole grain products such as brown rice and whole meal bread are important dietary sources of fibre, vitamins, minerals and other bioactive compounds that benefit in protection against obesity, diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular disease. Balancing intake between refined grains and whole grains is recommended to achieve the benefits of whole grains.

The dangers of too much sugar

Sugar, when taken excessively can lead to health problems such as weight gain and increase the risk of noncommunicable diseases (NCDS) such as type two diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular disease and non-alcoholic fatty liver disease. Consumption of sugar can also reduce the intake of more nutritious foods and beverages.

Knowing the difference for better health

There are various types of carbohydrates that we can choose from such as whole grains and the ones that we need to limit such as processed and ultraprocessed food. Choosing the types of carbohydrates and following the recommended portion size is important for your overall health. You can also refer to the Malaysian Food Pyramid and Healthy Plate Method as guidelines.

The importance of a balanced diet cannot be emphasised only for a healthy lifestyle. This can be attained by maintaining a balanced diet and keeping into consideration all the essential nutrients and vitamins required by the body.

A proper meal plan will help attain an ideal body weight and reduce the risk and protect against malnutrition in all its forms, as well as NCDS including diabetes, heart disease, stroke, cardiovascular and other types of cancer.