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YOUR HEALTH & FITNESS

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Putting carbs in their place

BY DR. JULIE T. CHEN

I've heard carbs are good for you and I've also heard carbs are bad for you. With all the good and bad press, I'm not sure what to eat. Please help!

WITH all the fad diets these days, it's a challenge to know which diets are beneficial and effective and which ones are harmful. Many of my patients ask about carbohydrates and whether they should avoid them altogether. What's interesting is that people frequently forget that fruits and vegetables are carbohydrates as well. So, even with diets that avoid carbs you are still getting them through your plant-based foods.

It's important to keep in mind that we shouldn't eliminate entire food groups at a time. Instead, you should learn to eat smart within each food group to maximize your nutritional intake and minimize weight gain and sugar issues.

When you focus on eating whole, unprocessed grains and vegetables, you are naturally going to be eating healthier and the weight will usually drop off thanks to your new eating pattern. Carbs like cookies, white breads, pastas and sweets are destructive to your body and to your weight loss efforts.

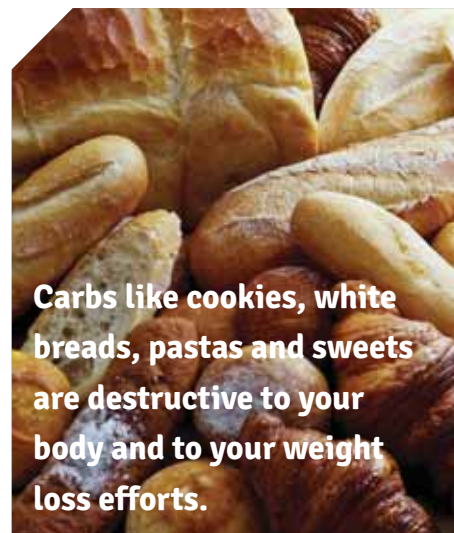
So, the way to focus on eating a well-balanced diet is to make sure that most of your carbohydrates are coming from vegetables.

For my patients that have pre-diabetes or diabetes, I usually recommend to stay with vegetables and avoid consuming too many fruits since they are higher in the sugar load. When there are high sugar load foods, or high glycemic index foods, the increased sugar-load on the body is more inflammatory and harmful to cellular functioning than those foods that are broken down slowly. These foods provide a steady stream of fuel to the body.

The body responds well to a diet that is mostly plant based with healthy fats and lean protein and low in sugar. The key image I usually recommend to my patients is to make sure that at least half of your plate is full of vegetables and another quarter of the plate is from lean proteins and healthy fats like avocados, nuts, or fish, and the last quarter of the plate is filled with whole unprocessed grains like quinoa, barley, oats, or brown rice, to name just a few.

The reason why I don't recommend a diet completely devoid of carbohydrates is because there are many health benefits in a diet that includes whole grains and vegetables.

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Carbs like cookies, white breads, pastas and sweets are destructive to your body and to your weight loss efforts.

A diet devoid of these is usually devoid of key vitamins, minerals, phytonutrients, and antioxidants. All of these are essential to regular cellular function.

So, when you are looking to fine-tune your diet, look towards eating a diet that is high in plants, healthy fats, lean proteins and whole unprocessed grains in the proportions I mentioned above.

The next time you are with friends and they are looking to streamline their diet as well, the key points to pass along are:

1. Eat a mostly plant-based diet.
2. Avoid refined sugars and carbohydrates.
3. Whole grains and vegetables should be the foundation of your carbohydrate intake.
4. Make sure to include healthy fats and lean proteins in your daily diet.
5. Avoiding major food groups is never a good idea in any diet that is meant to improve your health. 

Julie T. Chen, MD, is an integrative medicine physician with her own practice in San Jose, CA. Check out her website at makinghealthyez.com.