

PALO PINTO GENERAL HOSPITAL

Spring Wellness
Challenge

General Health
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Diabetes and Glycemic Index

You probably already know that any food with carbohydrates can raise blood sugar. That includes organic brown rice as well as Twinkies.

But your body handles different foods in different ways. A gram of carbs from one type of food can affect your blood sugar much differently than a gram from another will.

The "glycemic index" is used to rate how a particular food will affect blood sugar. The higher the glycemic index, the higher your blood sugar is likely to rise after a meal. That Twinkie, for example, has a higher glycemic index than the brown rice.

Don't skimp on carbs, but don't go overboard, either. The American Diabetes Association (ADA) and other groups recommend getting 45 to 65 percent of all calories from carbohydrates. That means shooting for about 45 to 60 grams of carbohydrates at every meal if you're a woman, 60 to 75 if you're a man. To put that in perspective, you could get 60 grams of carbs from a cup of pasta and a small piece of fruit.

You can lower the glycemic index of your meals with a few simple steps:

Go for fiber. Low glycemic index foods include fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. In general, the more fiber in a food, the lower the glycemic index. A dish of white rice or a slice of white bread will raise blood sugar just a little more than a dish of brown rice or a slice of whole grain bread. Still, eating whole-grain, high-fiber bread instead of low-fiber white bread is definitely a step in the right direction.

Avoid heavily processed foods. Food processing tends to boost the glycemic index by making carbs easier to digest. Instant oatmeal packs a bigger punch than regular oatmeal, and corn flakes will boost blood sugar more than an ear of sweet corn. The closer a food is to its natural state, the better.

Go easy on potatoes. Potatoes are loaded with carbs that quickly convert to sugar and head to the blood stream. Eat them only occasionally, and try to keep portions small. When you do eat potatoes, the less mashing the better. Mashing a potato can increase the glycemic index by 25 percent.

Because fat can slow down the flow of sugar to the bloodstream, French fries and potato chips actually have a lower glycemic index than a baked potato. But all of that fat (and calories) make fries and chips a poor choice.

Mix it up. You can soften the impact of foods with a high glycemic index by combining them with some low GI foods. If you're having a white-bread bagel, for instance, try spreading it with a tablespoon of peanut butter (protein) instead of strawberry jelly.

A splash of vinegar. Anything acidic will help lower a meal's glycemic index. If you're eating something that could be perked up with a little vinegar or lemon juice, go ahead -- you'll be doing more than adding flavor.



American Diabetes Association. *Glycemic index and diabetes.*

<http://www.diabetes.org/food-nutrition-lifestyle/nutrition/meal-planning/glycemic-index-and-diabetes.jsp>