Basic Carbohydrate Counting

Basic carbohydrate counting is a way to plan meals. It is done by counting the amount of carbohydrate in foods. Eating carbohydrate increases blood sugar levels. People with diabetes use carbohydrate counting to help keep their blood sugar at a normal level.

Foods that have carbohydrate are starches (including grains, beans, and starchy vegetables) and sweets.

COUNTING CARBOHYDRATES IN FOODS:

The first step in counting carbohydrate is to learn how many carbohydrate servings you should have in every meal. A dietitian can plan this for you. After learning the amount of carbohydrate to include in your meal plan, you can start to choose the carbohydrate containing foods you want to eat.

There are two ways to identify the amount of carbohydrate in the foods you eat.

1. That carbohydrate counting is made simple for you. Read the Nutrition Facts panel on food labels. All you need are two pieces of information from the Nutrition Facts panel to count carbohydrate this way:
   - Serving Size
   - Total Carbohydrate (in grams)

Decide how many servings you will be eating. If it is one serving, then you will be eating the amount of carbohydrate listed on the panel. If you will be eating two servings, then you will double the amount of carbohydrate listed on the panel.

2. **Learn serving sizes.** A serving size of most carbohydrate containing foods is about 15 grams. Listed below are serving sizes of common carbohydrate-containing foods.
   - 1 slice of bread
   - ¾ cup unsweetened dry cereal
   - ½ cup hot cereal
   - 1/3 cup rice
   - ½ cup mashed potatoes
   - 1/3 cup pasta
   - 1 cup of fresh fruit
   - 1/2 cup canned fruit
   - 1 cup milk (whole, 2% or skim)
   - 1/2 cup starchy vegetables (peas, corn or potatoes)

Counting carbohydrate this way is similar to looking on the Nutrition Facts panel.

- Decide how many servings you will eat first.
- Multiply the number of servings you eat by 15 grams.

15 grams is the amount of carbohydrate per serving. For example, if you have 2 cups of strawberries then you had 2 servings. That means you had 30 grams of carbohydrate (2 servings x 15 grams = 30 grams).

CALCULATING CARBOHYDRATES IN A MEAL

SAMPLE DINNER:

- 3 oz chicken breast
- 2/3 cup brown rice
- ½ cup corn
- 1 cup fat free milk
- 1 cup strawberries with sugar free whipped topping

Carbohydrate calculation:

First pick the foods that contain carbohydrate:

- Rice
- Corn
- Milk

- Strawberries

Calculate the number of servings eaten
2 servings rice
1 serving corn
1 serving milk
1 serving strawberries

Multiply the number of servings by 15 grams
2 servings rice x 15 grams = 30 grams carbohydrate
1 serving corn x 15 grams = 15 grams carbohydrate
1 serving milk x 15 grams = 15 grams carbohydrate
1 serving strawberries x 15 grams = 15 grams carbohydrate

Add the amount of carbohydrate eaten:
30 grams carbohydrate
15 grams carbohydrate
15 grams carbohydrate
+15 grams carbohydrate
75 grams carbohydrate eaten at dinner

Information from www.eatright.org, Foodwise Nutritional Analysis Database.

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