

9 Myths About Carbs You Shouldn't Believe

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Carbs have a bad rap. If you want to lose weight, you have to cut back on carbs, right? Or you were so out of shape this weekend because all you did was stuff your face with carbs, no?

Though there may be *some* truth to these beliefs, it would be kind of ridiculous to think that carbs are solely to blame. Give carbohydrates a break and stop parroting these myths. You just might learn to [love donuts \(again\)](#).

Your body doesn't *really* need carbs

Though it's technically [possible to survive without carbs](#), it's less than ideal. Carbs are the main energy source for the brain, [crossing the blood/brain barrier](#) when they break down to glucose. "If you limit the amount of glucose going to the brain, your body finds another way to get that energy," says Leslie Bonci, founder of Active Eating Advice and the director of sports nutrition at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. "It ends up breaking down muscle to fuel the brain, like cannibalizing on itself in a way since there [isn't] a sufficient amount of carbs to pull from."

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Carbs are a "bad" food

"Just because you've seen a photo in a magazine of a grain of rice hitting you on the head with a hammer doesn't mean that carbohydrates are a bad food," Bonci says. "A bad food is one that you have an intolerance or allergy to, or one that is spoiled. Carbs aren't a bad food." Buying into the mindset of carbs as evil takes the enjoyment out of eating foods like pizza. And there's [so much good pizza to eat](#).

If you cut down on carbs, you'll lose weight

When you back off carbs for a few days, maybe a week, then you step on the scale, see that the number dropped, and immediately attribute it to the carbs. That might be true! But cutting carbs isn't a surefire weight-loss trick. "Fat loss isn't guaranteed by cutting carbs," Bonci adds. "The loss on the scale is most likely water weight, not necessarily fat, because [carbs hold on to water](#)."

Carbs make you fat

People who've gone on a diet like Paleo or Atkins -- which minimize carbs -- may feel bloated when they return to their normal eating patterns, which can mean they "feel fat." Why? "Carbs are critical for fluid balance," explains Bonci. "That feeling of discomfort isn't that you gained fat, but rather that you're holding on to more water."



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You should eat carbs early in the day

"It's as though come 6:05pm, people think the body suddenly gets stupid and doesn't know what to do," says Bonci, "and that just isn't the case." In other words, your body will know what to do with carbs regardless of the hour. The only reason someone may want to limit them later in the day is if they hit carb need by lunch. "In that case, maybe it's best to go with a veggie and protein dinner," says Bonci. "But dictating [a] time to use carbs is totally false."

There's an ideal percentage of carbs that should make up your diet

"It's not one size fits all when it comes to calories and the percent of carbs consumed per day," says Bonci. "It depends on the individual, exercise goals, and health issues." Generally, Bonci recommends 40% to 60% of food consumption should be carbs, though some people may be better off with lower or higher. The bottom line is that you can tweak your diet to find something that works for you, because how the body feels and functions is more important than the number on the scale.

The best time to eat carbs is after a workout

That all depends on the duration and intensity of your workout. If you're going for a one-mile walk, you probably don't need to carb up after. If you ate a meal very close to the time of your workout, again, think twice before you start scarfing down more food.

If you just went through an intense strength-training session and haven't eaten in a few hours, you should refuel

with carbs AND protein. “If you only have carbs or only protein after a workout, you’re... not doing all you can for recovery,” Bonci says. “It’s not either -- you need both.”



[Flickr/Luke Jones](#)

Carbs are only in pasta, bread, rice, and other grain products

Carbs are basically in **everything**. They’re found in dairy, fruit, and vegetables, and on and on. It’s all about being selective when it comes to the carbs you choose to consume. “Don’t cut them all out, just have less of some and more of others,” Bonci advises. “For example, foods with more fiber will keep you fuller longer, so choose those options.” Eat your vegetables, and steer clear of too many cookies, and you’ll probably be fine.

Carbs and sugar are different things

Sugar is one *type* of carbohydrate, but starch and fiber are also carbohydrates. Sugars are sometimes called simple carbs, and several of them [can join together to form polysaccharides](#), often referred to as complex carbs. Complex carbs typically take longer for the body to break down into usable fuel.

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