

# Nutrition Myths and Facts

Once upon a time in nutrition land...

**N**utrition myths—popular beliefs not grounded in fact or science—seem to sprout up everywhere. And after we’ve heard them repeated over and over, we tend to believe them. The study of nutrition is a science, and science is based on research and grounded in facts—not myths.

The next time someone tells you one of these popular nutrition myths, respond with the science. You’ll gain instant respect as the local nutrition expert!

- **MYTH:** Margarine has fewer calories than butter. **FACT:** Stick margarine and stick butter have about 35 calories per teaspoon. Diet margarine, however, has fewer calories than both stick margarine and butter because its first ingredient is water.
- **MYTH:** Eating after (insert time here) causes weight gain. **FACT:** The total number of calories consumed and expended determines weight gain or loss, not the timing of eating. Establishing a rule of not eating past a certain time in the evening may help you avoid overeating for the entire day, but it’s not essential.
- **MYTH:** Fruit shouldn’t be eaten with meals, and meat and fruit eaten at the same meal can’t be digested. **FACT:** Our bodies produce the necessary enzymes to digest foods at all times. You might prefer to eat certain foods at specific times of the day, but it’s a personal preference, not a scientific rule.
- **MYTH:** Fresh fruits and vegetables are more nutritious than frozen. **FACT:** If you consume fruits or vegetables picked that day from your local farmer, then yes, they’re more nutritious than frozen. But the reality is that fruits and vegetables are usually grown and picked thousands of miles away from your kitchen, transported to your local grocery store over the course of a few days, sit in the store for a



few more days, and then sit in your fridge. The more time that elapses from picking to eating, the more nutrients that are lost. Frozen fruits and vegetables are picked and processed quickly, so they retain more nutrients than does fresh produce that’s really several days old.

- **MYTH:** Taking B vitamins gives you more energy. **FACT:** Energy comes from calories, and vitamins don’t contain calories. B vitamins play a vital role in energy production, but you’ll gain more energy by eating foods that naturally contain B vitamins, such as whole grains, than you will with a supplement.
- **MYTH:** Carrots are high in sugar. **FACT:** One serving of baby carrots contains 4 grams of sugar. One regular size Milky Way candy bar contains 35 grams of sugar. Even if you ate nine servings of carrots at one sitting, you’d get good amounts of fiber, vitamin K, vitamin A, and potassium. Sugar is simply a form of carbohydrates, and the nutrient density of carrots far outweighs the minimal sugar content. ♣

— Lynn Grieger, RD, CDE, cPT

# Good Carbs, Bad Carbs

With food guides scattering carbs on opposing ends of pyramids, and experts telling you to ‘get more fiber’ and ‘eat whole grains,’ straight talk on carbs is in short supply.

**C**arbs are good! Carbs are bad! The “Carb Wars” have been fought for decades, and good nutrition has been the victim. Of the three main solid nutrients the body needs—protein, fat, and carbohydrates—the latter has been the subject of the greatest amount of confusion and misinformation.

Since the 1970s, carb confusion has meant big bucks for an army of self-appointed experts taking deliberate advantage of America’s burgeoning obese population. Most of these experts’ diets demonize carbohydrates, ignoring the fact that the relationship between weight management and carb intake hinges on the type and form of carb and its preparation.

The best example is potatoes. The homely and delightfully starchy tuber remains condemned with

an unwarranted negative perception. However, a potato cooked “low and slow,” that is, via boiling or steaming, is about the healthiest carbohydrate source you can eat, packed with a balance of both complex and fiberlike (indigestible) starches that provide energy stored as glycogen, rather than fat, plus high satiety. This is also true of root vegetables and whole grains.

“The biggest source of confusion is the fact that ‘carbohydrates’ is really too generalized a term,” says Mark Anthony, PhD, an adjunct professor at St. Edward’s University in Austin, Texas, and author of *Gut Instinct: Diet’s Missing Link*. The misunderstanding stems from the fact that most people, including many health experts, think of carbohydrates as a single nutrient class, equating sugar with starch with fiber, while nutrition resources uphold the oversimplified approach. Yet it can’t be stressed enough: A carbohydrate is not a carbohydrate is not a carbohydrate.

“The best way to keep carbohydrate messages simple would be to do away with the term altogether,” says Anthony. “When popular diets trumpet a ‘low-carb’ lifestyle and then push plenty of fruits and vegetables, it’s no wonder consumers end up in the dark, especially when they encounter advice from expert sources to ‘eat plenty of good carbs such as fruits and vegetables.’”

## THE CHEMISTRY OF CARBS

The structural differences between carbohydrate forms and their impact on human metabolism vary widely. Carbohydrates run the span of single sugar molecules such as glucose and fructose and reach across the long chains of starches to various forms of fibers.

Banana-Mango Fool





**Brown Rice Succotash**

All carbs are made of single sugar molecules (glucose, fructose, lactose, or galactose) built from carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen. Each of these molecules can be linked into a chain called a saccharide. So-called simple carbohydrates are links of one or two sugar molecules. Longer chains of about 20 or more sugars, also known as polysaccharides, are often called complex carbohydrates. (Although both fibers and starches are polysaccharides, often starches are referred to as complex carbohydrates.)

The body breaks down and stores all these forms of carbohydrate at different rates and sometimes in different ways, which is why some carb forms are considered more “fattening” than others.

### NOT GUILTY

Far from a nutritional demon that should be eliminated from the diet, carbs are essential to

good health. As Anthony puts it, “Without carbs, you die. It’s that simple.”

Few consumers are aware that the body and the brain run on glucose or that fiber, which we all need, is a form of carbohydrate. So the goal shouldn’t be to avoid all carbs but rather to consume those foods that provide the balances of simple, complex, and indigestible carbohydrates that allow for a balance of optimum energy needs.

### ‘SUPERCARBS’

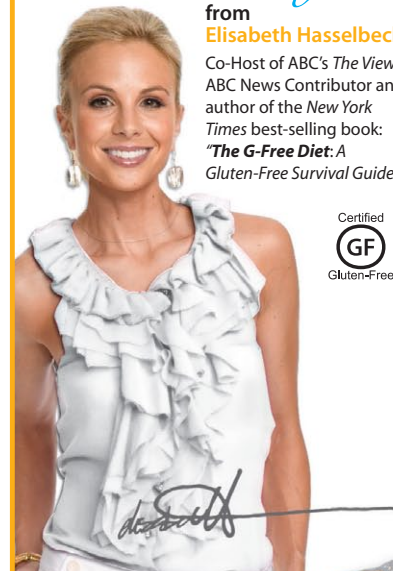
With the antioxidant superfruit trend yielding great success for the promotion of red and purple produce of all sorts, it’s time to present some “supercarb” foods that combine the best in simple, complex, and fiberlike carbohydrates.

Although by no means complete, our list will focus on potatoes, root veggies, legumes, bananas, mangos, and grains such as barley, corn, and rice to

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French Lentil and Tangerine Salad

Two Potato and Edamame Salad



function as the base of a dietary framework for representing carbohydrates as the life-sustaining foods they are. And all these examples contain a mix of simple, complex, and fiberlike carbs in harmonious balance. They promote health by providing not only a source of readily usable and stored energy but also properties that improve many aspects of human metabolism underlying serious health concerns, specifically obesity, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes. Carbohydrates even play a role in hormone balance, sleep cycles, and emotional well-being.

Most items on this list of “supercarbs” contain resistant starch, a relatively newly discovered form of starch with important health benefits beyond those of true dietary fiber and starch, including easier weight management, better blood-sugar balance, improved digestive health, cancer protection, and immunity.

What makes resistant starch unique is that in foods, it acts like a starch, giving a fluffy texture and satisfying taste. But in the body, it acts like a fiber. It got its moniker because it isn’t digested until it hits the lower gastrointestinal tract. By being resistant to digestion, it gives up only about 2 to 3 calories of energy.

But resistant starch has some additional important and unique properties. It ferments in the lower gastrointestinal tract and stimulates healthy flora to produce short-chain fatty acids. The fermentation is responsible for a cascade of effects, including shifting the body into “fat-burning” mode, strengthening the protective mucosal barrier and preventing carcinogenic damage to DNA in the large intestine, elevating lipid oxidation while reducing fat deposition, and increasing the production of certain satiety hormones. Moreover, research has demonstrated that people who eat at least 25 grams of resistant starch per day naturally consume around 300 fewer calories throughout the day.

With all these benefits nestled in so many comfort foods, it would be a shame if the campaign against carbohydrates continues to sow confusion.

## Hot Barley Oats With Pears, Cranberries, and Maple Syrup

Makes 4 servings

- ½ cup quick-cooking barley flakes
- ½ cup quick-cooking steel-cut oat flakes
- ½ cup rice milk
- 2 medium pears, peeled, cored, and chopped
- ¼ cup dried cranberries
- ¼ cup finely chopped walnuts, pecans, or almonds
- 3 tablespoons pure maple syrup
- ⅛ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ⅛ teaspoon ground cardamom

Simmer barley and oats for 5 minutes in 2 cups boiling salted water with the rice milk. Stir in remaining ingredients; simmer 5 minutes more. Serve immediately.

**TD&N Nutrient Analysis:** Calories: 286; Total Fat: 7 g; Saturated Fat: 1 g; Polyunsaturated Fat: 3 g; Monounsaturated Fat: 1 g; Cholesterol: 0 mg; Sodium: 16 mg; Carbohydrates: 56 g; Fiber: 7 g; Protein: 6 g



Statistically, people who get the majority of their calories from complex carbohydrates prepared in ways that optimize nutritional value are the people with the healthiest weight profiles. That makes a bowl of piping hot mashed potatoes a lot less terrifying, doesn't it? 🍌

— David Feder, RD

## Two Potato and Edamame Salad

Makes 4 to 6 servings

- ½ pound purple potatoes, scrubbed and cut into 1-inch-thick pieces
- ½ pound Irish potatoes, scrubbed and cut into 1-inch-thick pieces

- 1 cup frozen shelled edamame
- ⅓ cup chopped green onions
- 3 tablespoons light soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon toasted sesame oil
- 1 heaping teaspoon sesame seeds
- ¼ teaspoon dried red chili flakes (optional)

Boil potatoes in lightly salted water until just cooked through, about 10 to 15 minutes, stirring in edamame during the last few minutes of cooking. Drain well and immediately toss gently with remaining ingredients. Cover and chill before serving.

**TD&N Nutrient Analysis (based on 4 servings):** Calories: 187; Total Fat: 5 g; Saturated Fat: 1 g; Polyunsaturated Fat: 2 g; Monounsaturated Fat: 2 g; Cholesterol: 0 mg; Sodium: 401 mg; Carbohydrates: 27 g; Fiber: 4 g; Protein: 8 g

## Chickpea-Stuffed Avocados

Makes 4 servings

- 1 can (14.5 ounces) chickpeas (garbanzo beans), rinsed and drained
- 1 small red bell pepper, finely chopped
- ½ small red onion, peeled and minced
- 2 tablespoons purchased Italian dressing
- Sea salt
- Freshly ground pepper
- 2 large Hass avocados, halved lengthwise and pitted
- Fresh snipped basil

Combine chickpeas, bell pepper, onion, and dressing in a bowl; add salt and pepper to taste. Spoon into avocado halves and top with snipped basil.

**TD&N Nutrient Analysis:** Calories: 316; Total Fat: 18 g; Saturated Fat: 3 g; Polyunsaturated Fat: 3 g; Monounsaturated Fat: 11 g; Cholesterol: 0 mg; Sodium: 437 mg; Carbohydrates: 35 g; Fiber: 12 g; Protein: 7 g

