Getting Started on a Low Carb Lifestyle for Type 2 Diabetes

**What is a low carb lifestyle?** A low carb lifestyle limits your intake of carbohydrates (carbs) from foods like bread, pasta, rice, potatoes and other starchy vegetables, sweets, baked goods, sugary beverages, and fruits and emphasizes proteins, non-starchy vegetables, and healthy fats.

**Very Low Carbohydrate (Ketogenic)**

*Less than 50 grams of carbs per day*

- 0g
- 40g
- 80g

**Low Carbohydrate**

*50-130 grams of carbs per day*

- 120g
- 160g
- 200g

**High Carbohydrate**

*(Standard American Diet)*

*225-325 grams of carbs per day*

- 240g
- 280g

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**Meal with ~16g of carbs**

- 4-5 oz Grilled Fish or Chicken
- 3 cups Mixed Salad
- 1 oz Feta Cheese and Olives
- 2 tbsp Ranch Dressing
- 1/2 Avocado

**Meal with ~47g of carbs**

- 1/2 cup Brown Rice
- 1/2 cup Black Beans
- 4-5 oz Steak
- 1.5 cups Grilled Vegetables

**Meal with ~150g of carbs**

- 2 slices Pepperoni Pizza
- 4 pcs Mozzarella Sticks
- 1/2 cup Marinara Sauce
- 12 oz Regular Soda

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**How does a low carb lifestyle help my diabetes?** Reducing your carb intake also reduces your body's blood sugar and insulin levels. When your insulin levels are low, your body stops storing extra sugar as fat, and starts using stored fat for energy. This can make it easier to lose weight and have more energy!

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**The benefits of a low carb lifestyle**

- **WEIGHT LOSS**
- **REDUCED BLOOD PRESSURE**
- **REDUCED HUNGER & CRAVINGS**
- **BLOOD SUGAR CONTROL**
- **INCREASED ENERGY**

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**What are carbs?** Carbs (i.e., carbohydrates) are a nutrient that is broken down by the body into sugar (glucose). There are 3 types of nutrients: carbs, fat, and protein.

**What is blood sugar (or blood glucose)?** Blood sugar is the level of sugar in your blood after your body breaks down nutrients into glucose for energy.

**What is insulin?** Insulin is a chemical released when you eat carbs. Everyone needs insulin to live.

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The American Diabetes Association supports individualized eating plans for people with type 2 diabetes. Reducing your carbohydrates can help you control blood sugar and reduce medications.
**What does insulin do?** Insulin helps move glucose (sugar) from the blood into the cells for energy. You can think of insulin as a key that unlocks your cell so that glucose can enter. High levels of insulin tell your body to store extra sugar as fat. Low levels of insulin tell your body to burn fat for energy.

### What happens when you eat a low vs. high carb meal?

**LOW CARB**
- Meal
- Blood Sugar (mg/dL)
- Time
- Blood sugar and insulin return to normal

**HIGH CARB**
- Meal
- Blood Sugar (mg/dL)
- Time
- Blood sugar and insulin still high

Lower levels of blood sugar and insulin allow your body to burn fat for energy, making you feel more energetic and full.

Extreme high and low levels of blood sugar and insulin causes hunger, cravings, and tiredness, which lead to weight gain over time.

### Getting Started

- **Start by changing one meal at a time (i.e., breakfast).** It can be easier to transition gradually to a low carb meal plan. Start with making changes to one meal and do this for a few days to a week. Once you’ve got the hang of it, modify your next meal to low carb. Focus on:
  - Adding protein, non-starchy vegetables, & healthy fats
  - Swapping out your starch (bread, rice, potato, pasta etc.) for non-starchy vegetables (broccoli, leafy greens, cauliflower, green beans etc.)

- **Listen to your hunger cues.** One benefit of following a low carb lifestyle is you don’t have to count calories. You are encouraged to eat when you are hungry and stop when you are full.

- **Replace sugary drinks such as pop and fruit juice with water and unsweetened beverages.** Enjoy black coffee and unsweetened teas. If using flavored creamers, replace it with a splash of heavy cream or sugar-free versions.

- **Find good snack options.** Replace high carb, sugary snacks like chips and baked goods with low sugar fruits like berries. For savory snacks, try veggies and dip, deviled eggs, tuna salad, or nuts and cheese combos. Combining fats and protein help make a balanced and satisfying snack.

### Eat This

- Eggs or omelette
- Water with lemon
- 80%+ dark chocolate, sugar-free Jell-o
- Greek yogurt w/ berries
- Lettuce wrap, low carb bread
- Riced cauliflower
- Mixed nuts, string cheese, jerky
- Grilled chicken, steak, pork, tofu
- Sliced veggies, pickles, olives
- Sparkling water, fruit-infused water
- Seltzer, gin or vodka tonic
- Berries, melon, kiwi, apple
- Mashed cauliflower, rutabaga, kohlrabi
- Keto “cloud” dough, nut flour crust
- Mustard, oil and vinegar, herbs, spices
- Almond or coconut flour
- Heavy cream, sugar-free creamer
- Stevia, monkfruit, erythritol, sucralose
- Zucchini noodles, hearts of palm pasta, shirataki noodles, spaghetti squash

### Not That

- Cereal or bagel
- Juice
- Watermelon
- Pastries
- Ice cream
- Bread
- Rice
- Crackers
- Fried foods
- Packaged snacks
- Soda
- Beer
- Sugary snacks
- Potatoes
- Pizza dough
- Ketchup
- White flour
- Flavored creamer
- Sugar
- Pasta

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Low carbohydrate eating patterns should not be used in combination with SGLT2 inhibitor medications. Talk to your doctor before reducing the carbohydrates in your diet.