

# Carb Smart

Carbohydrate can be found in the all five food groups. However, not all types of carbohydrate are healthy choices. Some are better than others.

- **Fruits:** Naturally sweet, fruits are healthy sources of carbohydrate, because they contain fiber, vitamins, and minerals. Choose whole fruits instead of fruit juice.
- **Vegetables:** Brightly colored vegetables are also healthy sources of carbohydrate. Go for color and variety. Potatoes don't count as a vegetable; they are rich in carbohydrate but should be eaten only in small quantities, if at all, because they are digested and absorbed quickly (like refined grains).
- **Grains:** Whole grains, which are high in fiber, vitamins, and minerals, are a much better choice than refined grains. Choose whole grains and whole-grain products without added sugar and unhealthy fat (see Teacher Resource 15.2 for examples of each).
- **Protein:** Beans provide healthy, slowly digested carbohydrate and are rich in fiber and protein.
- **Dairy:** Unflavored milk and plain yogurt naturally contain "milk sugar" (lactose). Flavored milk and yogurt typically have a lot of added sugar, so it's best to choose plain, unflavored, and unsweetened dairy products.

The amount of carbohydrate in the diet—high or low—is less important than the type of carbohydrate in the diet. To be carb smart, keep the following tips in mind:

- Choose a variety of whole grains over refined grains.
- When selecting foods made with whole grains, choose products that list whole wheat, whole oats, whole rye, or other whole grains as the first ingredient and that keep the grain as intact as possible.
- Watch out for added sugar in the ingredients list, which can be labeled as fructose, glucose, sucrose, corn syrup, or honey, among others. Many grain-based foods, especially cereals, are marketed as being made with whole grains and list a whole grain as the first ingredient—yet added sugar is at the top of the ingredients list, or it appears multiple times throughout the list.
- Sugary drinks and foods made with refined grains and added sugar, such as cookies and doughnuts, are high in carbohydrate but are not healthy choices because they can cause blood sugar levels to spike and then fall to lower-than-normal levels. Foods such as these should be eaten only rarely, if ever.
- Brightly colored fruits and vegetables are also excellent carbohydrate choices, as are beans.

From L.W.Y. Cheung, H. Dart, S. Kalin, B. Otis, and S.L. Gortmaker, 2016, *Eat Well & Keep Moving*, 3rd ed. (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics).