

# The Slow-Carb Diet

Dietary changes can help stabilize blood sugar, decrease insulin levels, improve depression, decrease mood swings, help with weight loss, decrease cardiovascular risk factors and improve sleep quality.

## Cut Calories with Low-Glycemic Index Foods

Eating a diet composed mostly of foods with a low glycemic index may help you cut calories without cravings by balancing blood-sugar levels.

## "Good" vs. "Bad" Carbohydrates

In the simplest of terms, a low-glycemic diet is generally high in good carbohydrates (like vegetables and whole grains) and low in bad ones (like chocolate chip cookies). Lean proteins and healthy fats round out the rest. "It's the middle ground between diets that are packed with protein, which promise satiety, and those loaded with fiber, which are the most nutritious."

## The Glycemic Index Equation

The glycemic index (GI) is a system of ranking carbohydrates based on how much they raise blood-glucose levels. It was originally developed for diabetics, but its usefulness has grown with our understanding of the impact blood-sugar levels have on hunger. You eat a carbohydrate. The rise in blood sugar triggers a boost in insulin production. Insulin reduces your blood sugar, which leaves you feeling irritable and lethargic. Falling blood-sugar levels can cause you to get hungrier faster.

## Balance Your Blood Sugar Levels

There are lots of things you can do to keep your blood-sugar levels balanced. Daily exercise helps, and so do regularly spaced snacks and meals, but your food choices are key. That's where low-GI foods come in. Foods with a GI lower than 55 raise blood sugar slightly, while those in the 55 to 70 range raise it a little higher; carbohydrates with a GI of more than 70 send it soaring. Low-GI foods have a more moderate effect on blood-sugar levels, primarily because they slow digestion — that's why some low-GI plans call themselves "slow carb."

A number of studies show that a low-GI meal can be more satisfying than a high-GI meal and can help control overeating; some experts speculate that this effect may lead to weight loss. Research also shows that eating a low-GI diet may help prevent insulin resistance, which is a likely culprit in the development of diabetes. Furthermore, since insulin resistance leads to excess weight gain around the waist, a known risk factor for cardiovascular disease, a diet based on low-GI foods may also be protective of your heart.

## Make a Low-GI Diet Work for You

Rigidly following a low-glycemic index diet plan isn't easy. For one thing, it's difficult to know what to eat unless you carry an extensive list like ours around with you. Just try picking out a breakfast cereal: All-Bran has a low GI (38) while Bran Flakes has a high one (74). And, oddly, sugar has a lower GI (61) than whole wheat bread or potatoes. "You can't throw out all of your nutrition know-how because of the index," says Thomas Wolever, MD, PhD, a GI researcher and professor of nutrition at the University of Toronto. "Chocolate cake may have a lower GI than wheat bread, but this doesn't mean it's better for you. You have to take into account that the cake also has more fat, sugar, and calories and less fiber."

Complicating things even further is that GI rankings compare foods based on a set amount of carbohydrates (usually 50 grams), which doesn't always correlate to normal portion sizes. And when you start combining foods, their effect on your blood-sugar levels changes. But before you give in to your doughnut desires, relax. Here's how to reap the benefits of a low-GI diet.

- Replace as many as possible high-GI foods in your diet with healthy lower-GI alternatives.
- Add or substitute at least one healthy low-GI food at each meal. Include protein and fat whenever you eat a high-GI food.
- Choose low-GI whole grains over refined as often as possible.
- Reduce the blood-sugar impact of any food by pairing it with one that has a lower glycemic index. For example, smother waffles (high-GI) with blueberries (low-GI).
- Control portions. Big meals — no matter what they contain — always stimulate a higher blood-glucose response than smaller ones, says Dr. Katz.

### Slow-Meal Makeovers

**Instead of:** Instant oatmeal

**Try:** Old-fashioned oatmeal

**Why:** The chewiness of old-fashioned oatmeal is largely due to the high percentage of hard, compact starch granules, as well as fiber. These granules are more complicated to break down, and they slow the digestive process. In contrast, much of the starch in instant oatmeal has been presoftened during processing, so it's digested more quickly.

**Instead of:** Turkey sandwich on whole wheat; baked chips

**Try:** Turkey on 100 percent stone-ground whole wheat with lettuce, tomato, avocado; cup of tomato soup

**Why:** Stone-ground whole wheat is coarser, which makes it slightly more difficult to digest (that's a good thing). The avocado provides fat and the tomato soup is acidic. Fat and acid both slow digestion by delaying the rate at which food leaves your stomach.

**Instead of:** Pretzels

**Try:** Apple slices with peanut butter

**Why:** The apples provide fiber and the peanut butter adds fat, both of which slow digestion.

**Instead of:** Veggie stir-fry with instant white rice

**Try:** Chicken or tofu stir-fry with vegetables over basmati rice

**Why:** Like instant oatmeal, instant white rice gets digested very quickly because processing has softened much of the starch granules. Basmati rice is a better choice because the starch granules are more compact. The protein from the chicken or tofu helps slow digestion.

**Instead of:** Rice pudding

**Try:** Low-fat frozen yogurt with strawberries

**Why:** Strawberries add fiber and acid, which slow digestion.

## Low Glycemic Index Foods

Foods with a GI Score Lower Than 55

Food	Serving Size	Glycemic Index
Apple	1 medium	38
Artichokes, Jerusalem	1/2 cup	0
Avocado	1/4 cup	0
Baked beans	2/3 cup	38
Banana	1 medium	52
Barley, pearled	1 cup, cooked	25
Beans, kidney	2/3 cup, cooked	23
Black-eyed peas, canned	2/3 cup cooked	42
Bread, 100% whole grain	1-ounce slice	51
Broccoli, raw	1 cup	0
Bulgur	3/4 cup, cooked	48
Carrots	1 medium, raw	47
Cashews, salted	1.75 ounce	22
Cauliflower, raw	3/4 cup	0
Celery	2 stalks	0
Cereal, All-Bran	1/2 cup	30
Cherries, fresh	18	22
Chickpeas, canned	2/3 cup	42
Chocolate cake, with frosting, from a mix	one 4-ounce slice	38
Chocolate pudding, instant, with whole milk	1/2 cup	47
Cucumber, raw	3/4 cup	0
Grapes, green, fresh	3/4 cup	46
Grapefruit	1/2 medium	25
Grapefruit juice, unsweetened	1 cup	48
Ice cream, light, vanilla	1/2 cup	50
Lentils, brown	3/4 cup, cooked	29
Lentils, green	3/4 cup, cooked	30
Lettuce	4 leaves	0
Lima beans, baby, frozen	3/4 cup	32
M&M's, peanut	15 pieces	33
Mango	4 ounces	51
Maple syrup	1 tablespoon	54
Oatmeal	1 cup	49
Orange	1 medium	42
Orange juice, unsweetened	1 cup	53
Pasta, capellini	6 ounces, cooked	45
Pasta, fettuccine	1 1/2 cups, cooked	45
Pasta, linguine	1 1/2 cups, cooked	52

Pasta, ravioli, meat-filled	6.5 ounces, cooked	39
Pasta, spaghetti	1 1/2 cups, cooked	38
Pasta, tortellini, cheese-filled	6.5 ounces, cooked	50
Pasta, whole wheat spaghetti	1 1/2 cups, cooked	32
Peach, fresh	1 large	42
Peas, green, frozen	1/2 cup, cooked	48
Potato chips, plain, salted	2 ounces	54
Rice, brown	1 cup, cooked	50
Rice, converted, white	1 cup, cooked	38
Soup, canned, lentil	9 ounces	44
Strawberry jam	1 1/2 tablespoons	51
Sweet potato	5 ounces, cooked	44
Tomato juice, canned, no sugar	1 cup	38
Tomato soup	1 cup	38
Yam	1 cooked	37
Yogurt, low-fat, with fruit and sugar	1 cup	33

## Medium Glycemic Index Foods

Foods with a GI Score 55 to 70

Food	Serving Size	Glycemic Index
Basmati rice	1 cup, cooked	58
Beets, canned	1/2 cup	64
Bread, light rye	1-ounce slice	68
Bread, pita, white	1 ounce	57
Bread, rye	1-ounce slice	58
Bread, white	1-ounce slice	70
Cereal, muesli, Swiss formula	1 ounce	56
Cereal, Raisin Bran	1/2 cup	61
Corn	1/2 cup, cooked	60
Couscous	3/4 cup, cooked	65
Croissant	1 medium	67
Hamburger bun	1.5 ounces	61
Honey	1 tablespoon	55
Muffin, blueberry	1 small	59
Muffin, bran	1 small	60
Oatmeal cookies	4 small	55
Oatmeal, instant	1 cup	66
Pancakes, made from mix	two 4-inch	67

Pizza, cheese | 1 slice | 60  
Potatoes, new | 1 cup | 62  
Raisins | 1/2 cup | 64  
Rice, white, long-grain | 1 cup, cooked | 61  
Soup, black bean | 1 cup | 64  
Soup, pea, canned | 1 cup | 66  
Taco shells, baked | 2 | 68  
Tortilla chips, plain, salted | 1.75 ounces | 63

### High Glycemic Index Foods

Foods with a GI Score Higher Than 70

Food | Serving Size | Glycemic Index

Bread, French baguette | 1 ounce | 95  
Cereal, Bran Flakes | 1/2 cup | 74  
Cereal, Corn Flakes | 1 cup | 92  
Cereal, Grape-Nuts | 1/4 cup | 75  
Cereal, Total | 3/4 cup | 76  
Doughnut, cake-type | 1.75 ounces | 76  
English muffin | 1 ounce | 77  
French fries, frozen, heated | 30 fries | 75  
Gatorade, orange-flavored | 1 cup | 89  
Popcorn, plain, cooked in microwave | 1 1/2 cups | 72  
Potato, baked | 1 medium | 85  
Potatoes, mashed | 1 cup | 73  
Pretzels | 1 ounce | 83  
Puffed rice cakes, white | 3 cakes | 82  
Rice, instant, white | 3/4 cup, cooked | 87  
Scone, plain | 1 ounce | 92  
Stuffing, bread | 1 ounce | 74  
Waffles, Aunt Jemima | one 4-inch | 76  
Watermelon, fresh | 4 ounces | 72