

Carbohydrate Foods in Healthy Meals



How to match carbohydrate food amounts in main meals for different physical activity levels.

Why do we need carbohydrate?



1. Carbohydrate provides energy to fuel brain function and physical activity, including everyday tasks, leisure and sporting activities.



2. Many carbohydrate foods are also sources of dietary fibre, important for gut health, including wholegrain cereals and grains, fruit, vegetables and legumes.

How much carbohydrate food do I need?

The amount of carbohydrate food recommended in a healthy main meal will depend on your level of physical activity. You will need more carbohydrate food portions on more active than less active days.



What is a low, medium and high activity day?

0-1 hr



Low intensity physical activity and/or incidental activities

including leisurely or everyday activities
e.g. walking, gardening, cleaning or shopping.

1-2 hr



Moderate to intense physical activity and incidental activities

which slightly increase and maintain your heart rate e.g. bike riding, swimming, jogging, gym classes and hiking

2+ hr



Intense physical activity and incidental activities accumulated over a day

involving repetitive exercises and a high heart rate
e.g. boxing, spin classes and team sports

See next page for Portion Size Guide →

Portion Size Guide

This portion size guide provides examples of amounts equivalent to one portion of carbohydrate. Use this to work out how much you need per main meal.

	1 portion
Pasta/noodles/grains	½ cup cooked pasta/noodles/quinoa (¼ cup dry) ¼ cup cooked rice (1 tb dry)
Legumes (beans, peas, lentils)	¾ cup cooked (¼ cup dry)
Bread	1 slice or ½ roll/wrap
Starchy vegetables	1 medium potato ¼ medium sweet potato ½ corn cob
Fruit	1 piece (medium apple, banana, pear) 2 small pieces (kiwi fruit, nectarine, apricot)
Dairy Foods	1 glass milk (250mL) ½ cup yoghurt

Meal ideas



0 portions



½ cup rice = 2 portions



¾ cup rice = 3 portions



1 slice of toast = 1 portion



½ cup rice + ¾ cup chickpeas = 3 portions



¼ medium sweet potato + ½ cup cooked quinoa + 1 piece fruit + ½ cup yoghurt = 4 portions

For personalised advice, visit

Sports Dietitians Australia >



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Healthy, balanced meal ideas >

How to get enough iron? >

