



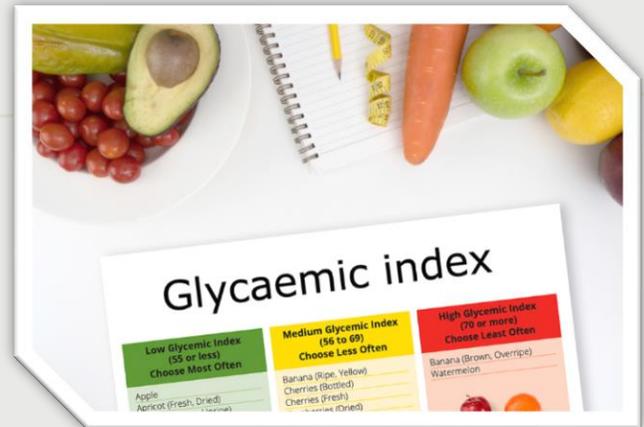
By Renae Eastlake, OSCAR Care Group Dietitian

There are three main fuel sources in our diet, namely **protein, fats and carbohydrates**, all of which play an important role in our health and nutrition.

Carbohydrates are an important energy source for the body foods and contain many essential nutrients and fibre.

Carbohydrates are found in fruit & vegetables, breads & grain products such as rice, pasta & quinoa, in dairy products including milk & yoghurt and in highly processed and sugary foods.

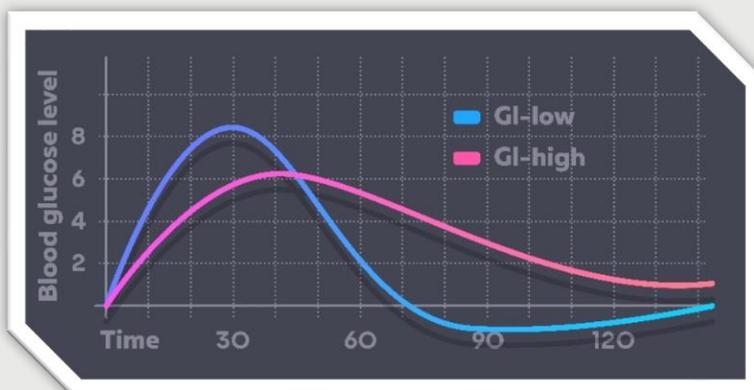
However, not all carbohydrate foods are created equal when it comes to their effects in the body. Choosing high quality carbohydrates in the correct amount is key. It is best to choose **carbohydrate-rich foods that are healthy and full of dietary fibre as these foods have a low glycaemic index** and will provide longer-lasting, slow released energy, which will have positive impacts on our health and well-being longer term.



What is glycaemic index?

The glycaemic index or GI is a ranking between 0-100, given to foods to **describe how quickly the carbohydrate in the food is broken down in digestion and absorbed into the blood stream**. Foods with a lower GI (GI rating below 55 on the scale) such as wholegrain breads and cereals, break down slowly and therefore the release of glucose into the bloodstream is also slower, providing a more stable rise in blood glucose levels and sustained energy after eating.

In contrast, when we consume a high GI foods such as lollies or white bread the food is broken down and digested quickly and glucose is released into the bloodstream rapidly causing a spike in **blood sugar levels**. This spike is often followed by a rapid drop in blood sugar levels just 1-2 hours later, leaving you feeling tired and hungry again.



Low GI foods:

- Wholegrain bread, pasta and quinoa
- Wholegrain cereals such as oats, untoasted muesli or bran
- Fruits: apples, apricots, oranges, berries (also a low sugar option)
- Dairy foods: yoghurt and milk
- Legumes: beans and lentils



High GI foods:

- White/ wholemeal breads, white rice, white flour
 - Processed, low fibre cereals
- Some fruits such as watermelon and fruit juice
- Processed foods such as lollies, biscuits, cakes and other sugar treats.



Why is it important to eat low GI foods?

- Eating low GI foods can help keep us **feeling fuller for longer** after eating, in turn this can assist with **weight management** as we do not need to eat as often.
- For people with diabetes, low GI foods help to **keep blood glucose levels stable** by providing a slower, more sustained release of glucose into the bloodstream.

What if I have diabetes...can I still eat carbohydrates?

YES. People with diabetes should still have moderate amounts of carbohydrate foods each day. Ideally carbohydrates will be spread evenly throughout the day and include mostly low to moderate GI choices that are also high in fibre. You do not need to exclude high GI foods, both high and low GI foods can be included in a healthy diet. Simply enjoy them in moderation and where possible eat them with other low GI foods or high protein foods to lower the overall GI of the meal.



Simple low GI swaps to make today:

• Breakfast:

- Instead of a couple of slices of white or wholemeal toast choose a wholegrain bread or traditional sourdough.
- Switch your bowl of sugary cereal to oats/porridge, untoasted muesli, or a cereal based on bran/wholegrains. Top with milk and/or yoghurt + some berries for a low GI, high fibre start to the day.

• Lunch:

- Use grainy breads, rolls or wraps and rolls instead of the white/ wholemeal versions and load it up with plenty of salad, a serve of lean protein and some good fats such as avocado.
- Pack a leafy green salad, with 1 serve of lean protein (can of tuna, strips of lean red meat, chicken or eggs) and add some low GI roasted sweet potato or a small tin of legumes.

• Dinner:

- Use the $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$ plate rule:
- Aim to fill a quarter of your plate with low-GI carbs, such as basmati rice, pasta, sweet potato or corn.
- $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate should be lean protein such as fish, chicken, red meat, eggs or tofu.
- $\frac{1}{2}$ plate should be non-starchy vegetables such as salad vegetables (tomatoes, cucumber, leafy greens), zucchini, mushrooms, capsicum, onion, broccoli, cauliflower etc.

• Snacks:

- Handful of raw nuts and seeds
- Wholegrain crackers with cheese
- Small tub of yoghurt + berries
- Piece of fruit such as an apple or orange.
- Veggies sticks and dip such as hummus



References:

Diabetes Australia <https://www.diabetesaustralia.com.au/glycemic-index>

Dietitians Association Australia – [Making sense of the Glycaemic index](#)



Can we help you with creating a Low GI Meal Plan?

This article was written by OSCAR Care Group Dietitian, Renae Eastlake.

Please call or email our Dietitians via our contact details below.

