Health and Wellness

POCKET TOOLS TRAINING

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Health & Wellness Series

NUTRITION NEWS

Carbohydrates: Simple or Complex?

In today's world of ever increasing fad diets, carbohydrates have seemed to take on a bad rap. Some people categorize carbs as "good" or "bad", while others believe there is no such thing as a good carb at all. No matter which side of the fence you stand on, two things are certain. One- our bodies do utilize carbohydrates to produce glucose, which in turn is used for energy by our cells. Two- In general, we consume more carbohydrates than we need, especially in the form of simple, refined, processed carbohydrate.

Simple Carbohydrates:
In "simple" terms, these carbs are made up of one or two sugar units. This means they can be broken down quickly in the body and converted to glucose (blood sugar.) While we recognize that certain amounts of glucose are needed to fuel the body and brain, the typical American diet provides far more than we possibly need. With the help of insulin, these sugars are metabolized quickly in our system- giving us a brief energy rush, followed by an energy crash. Sources of simple sugars include refined grains (white bread, pasta and rice), cakes cookies pies, soda, juices and melon fruit.

Complex Carbohydrates:
While simple carbohydrates are made up of one or two sugar units, complex carbs are made up of many… up to hundreds of sugar units. Because of this, it takes the body longer to break these sugar units down into the simple form of glucose. This slow breakdown process allows your body to maintain a steady supply of blood glucose, preventing the spike and energy- zapping blood sugar crash that simple carbs induce. Another advantage of complex carbohydrates is fiber content. Fiber is a type of carbohydrate that cannot be digested by human digestive enzymes. For this reason, fiber assists our bodies with digestion by making us feel fuller longer and aiding our large intestine functioning. Sources of complex carbohydrate include: whole wheat breads, whole-wheat pasta, brown rice, apples, oatmeal, beans, lettuce and broccoli.

How much do you need?
The acceptable distribution range for carbohydrates is 45-65% of your daily total caloric intake. These carbohydrates should come from whole grain products, vegetables and fruit. Furthermore, you should make sure you are getting at least 38 grams of fiber a day if you are a man, and 25 grams a day if you are a woman.

References:
Mary B. Grosvenor, L.A. (2010). Visualizing Nutrition. Hoboken, NJ; Wiley and Sons

Simple Carbohydrates

Complex Carbohydrates

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