Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates, sometimes just called carbs for short, are types of foods that humans need for energy to stay active. While the body uses proteins as building blocks for making strong bones and muscles, carbohydrates are the main fuel for the body. All carbohydrate foods are composed of the elements carbon, hydrogen and oxygen organized into molecules that are called sugar molecules. There are many more types of sugar molecules besides the white grains of sugar that adults put into their coffee. For example, fruits like apples and peaches contain a type of sugar called fructose and galactose is a sugar found in milk.

There are two types of carbohydrates called simple carbohydrates and complex carbohydrates. Simple carbohydrates have sugar molecules that are easily digested and provide quick energy. Commercials on television will advertise that eating a candy bar, which has lots of simple carbohydrate sugar, will give you a boost in energy. This is true but you get lots of calories from candy. A piece of fruit or a glass of milk also has simple carbohydrates that will give you a quick boost in energy. These healthy snacks provide the body with needed vitamins, minerals and fiber that candy or other sweet snacks like cookies do not have.

Complex carbohydrates contain large sugar molecules and each complex carbohydrate molecule is made up of many simple sugars. Complex carbohydrates are also called starches. Examples of starches include bread, pasta like spaghetti noodles or macaroni, rice and crackers. These foods are made from grains like wheat, rice or oats.

Complex carbohydrate foods are healthy to eat because they provide energy. Instead of providing quick energy like simple sugars, complex carbohydrates provide energy for a longer period of time. It takes time for the digestive system to break the complex carbohydrate into simple sugars that the body can use for fuel. This means that complex carbohydrates release energy all the time they are being digested.