

Carb Cutting Secrets

Want to know how to have your carbs and eat them too? With a few tips and tricks, you can have many of your high-carb favorites. Check out these carb cutting food makeovers. Who says you can't have it all?

Mashed Potatoes

A plate of mashed potatoes with a pat of butter on top is the kind of age-old comfort food almost no one can resist. But ...

One cup of mashed potatoes contains 35g of carbs.

Carb Cutting Secret #1: Go half and half.

To have comforting, creamy, mashed potatoes without racking up all those carbs, try this half and half approach. Use half the amount of potatoes you want for your dish. Substitute the other half with mashed cauliflower (6g of carbs per cup), which shaves your total carb count down to 20g of carbs for one cup.

Other options are turnips (about 8 grams of carbs and 3 grams of fiber per cup) and rutabaga (about 15 grams of carbs and 3 grams of fiber per cup) or some combination of all of these.

Add a mixture of one-half softened butter and one-half healthy, trans-free, vegetable oil spread. Then, warm some cream or half and half in the microwave, and beat into your vegetables until you get the consistency you like. Season to taste. For extra flavor, add minced garlic (raw or gently cooked) to the butter mixture, or mix in grated parmesan, romano, or asiago cheese.

Chowder

When it's cold outside, a steaming crock of chowder can be heaven on earth. Creamy New England clam chowder and corn chowder are right up there with mashed potatoes when it comes to comfort food. However, in terms of carbs and glycemic impact, chowders are usually off limits. Depending on the amount of potatoes or corn used, one cup of chowder could have as much as 50g of carbs.

Carb Cutting Secret #2: Split Pea Soup

Try this old fashioned, off-the-beaten-track, healthy alternative to potato- and corn-filled chowders.

Split peas are relatively low in carbohydrates (about 20g of carbs in one-half cup, 8 of which are fiber grams) and have a lower glycemic index than some other legumes.

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To make a quick homemade soup: Add 2 quarts of cold water to 2 1/4 cups of well-rinsed split peas. Let soak overnight, or just simmer for 2 minutes and soak for an hour. Then, bring to a boil, turn down the heat, and simmer covered for about an hour and a half. Add seasonings (salt, fresh pepper, nutmeg) and diced vegetables, such as onion, celery, carrots, and leeks. Then cook uncovered until veggies are tender.

Bread

White bread, as we all know, is the quintessential enemy of good blood sugar control. Along with white potatoes and table sugar, white bread sits at the top of the diabetes no-no list.

Carb Cutting Secret #3: Sourdough

Here's a little gem of a nutrition nugget for people with diabetes: When lactic acid is added to bread dough, it does two things: changes the flavor so that you get that tangy, delicious bite of sourdough and mediates the glycemic impact of all that white wheat flour. This anti-glycemic effect can even last through to the next meal. (Lactic acid isn't the only one that helps keep blood sugar in check. The acetic acid in vinegar and the citric acid in lemons and limes has the same effect.)

If you're feeling ambitious, find yourself a recipe for sourdough starter and bake your own sourdough bread. You'll learn an ancient method of preserving yeast in the process. Otherwise, check the bakery department of your natural foods store or even your supermarket for a variety of sourdough breads. White sourdough is better than regular white bread, but a whole grain sourdough will rank highest on the health meter and lowest in glycemic response.

Crispy Coating

Some things just aren't the same without a crunchy crust around them, but a coating made with flour and breadcrumbs can quickly make a healthy dish high-carb. One-quarter cup of breadcrumbs contains 20g of carbs.

Carb Cutting Secret #4: Crushed Nuts, Seeds, and Flakes

With a little creativity, you can have your crunch and stay in the healthy eating zone. Great, flavorful substitutions for bread crumbs abound: nuts, seeds, and (unsweetened) whole grain cereal flakes all can be crushed up in a plastic storage bag and used to coat fish fillets, chicken, shrimp, veggies, or anything else you'd normally coat with bread crumbs.

For crab cakes, meatballs, meatloaf and other foods that need help staying together, try mixing up a paste of baking powder and beaten egg to use as a binder instead of bread crumbs and egg. (Extra tip: When making crab cakes, use real crabmeat; imitation crab contains added sugar.)

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French Fries

Like mashed potatoes, French fries are one of those foods people have a very hard time resisting, even when an order of large fries comes with 60g of carbs. Yet since white potatoes can blood sugar more dramatically than even table sugar, and French fries usually come out of a commercial deep fryer, you're wise to move them onto your "don't go there" list.

Carb Cutting Secret #5: Sweet Potato or Jicama Fries

Using sweet potatoes or the crunchy vegetable called jicama (pronounced hik'-a-ma), you can enjoy crisp, salty fries now and then without the worry. The equivalent amount of sweet potato to an order of large fries delivers 27g of carbs and 4g of fiber. The same amount of jicama contains only about 12g of carbs.

Peel sweet potatoes, and then slice them up lengthwise like steak fries. Toss gently with extra virgin olive oil and seasonings of your choice, then bake at 425 degrees F for 10 minutes on each side. Jicama can be sliced thin (like matchsticks) and made either in the oven the same way (cut the time in half) or fried in a pan with a high-heat oil such as canola oil, grapeseed oil or refined sesame oil. You can also slice jicama super-thin like potato chips. Experiment with different spices on your fries, such as onion or garlic salt, paprika, or taco seasoning.

White Rice

Many people still believe that since rice is a grain, it's good for you. White rice is a grain that has been refined, which means the nutrient-dense parts of it have been stripped away, leaving only the starchy center. This center, or endosperm, is essentially the nutritional equivalent of table sugar, and it has a similarly powerful impact on blood glucose. One cup of white rice contains 59g of carbs.

Carb Cutting Secret #6: Whole Grains

The obvious better choice is brown rice, which is a whole grain rich in beneficial phytochemicals and fiber. A diet rich in whole grains is linked to decreased insulin resistance and increased insulin sensitivity, as well as an overall decreased risk of type 2 diabetes and other chronic diseases. However, brown rice is not a low glycemic food and contains about 46g of carbs in one cup.

Other great, whole-grain options abound. Try barley, the lowest glycemic grain (44g of carbs and 6g of fiber in one cup) buckwheat groats (a.k.a. kasha, with 33g of carbs and 5g of fiber in a cup), bulgur (34g of carbs, 8g fiber), or quinoa (39g carbs, 5g fiber). Each of these grains has a slightly different texture and flavor, but all can be substituted for rice.

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They can be cooked on the stovetop in boiling water (or better yet, use low sodium chicken, beef, or vegetable broth). Read package directions for amounts and time. Always test in the last five to 10 minutes to make sure the grains don't become mushy.

Succotash

A word made famous by Sylvester the Cat, succotash is a traditional, American side dish made of lima beans and corn kernels. Sweet, buttery, and easy on the mouth, it weighs in at about 47g of carbs and 9g of fiber per cup.

Carb Cutting Secret #7: Edamame and Squash

Lima beans have a relatively low glycemic index value (32, and under 55 is considered low), and a half-cup (of frozen baby limas) contains 18 grams of carbohydrate, 5 grams of fiber, and 6 grams of protein. A perfect stand-in for limas, however, is the green soybean known as edamame. Generally available frozen, shelled or in the pod, these beans are very similar to lima beans, but a half-cup contain 10 grams of carbs, 4 grams of fiber, and 11 grams of protein. Green soybeans are an excellent supply of vitamin C, calcium, and iron. They also contain all the amino acids needed to make a complete protein, which means they are a very decent substitute for meat.

Next, instead of high-carb corn in your succotash, use diced, sauteed yellow squash. You'll end up with a delicious side dish that looks just like succotash, with the same sweet and buttery flavors and textures, but a lot less impact on your sugar.

Sandwich or Burger Bun

A standard hard roll is made with enriched white flour and contains about 30g of carbs per roll. Don't let the seeds on top fool you: this is no health food. The carbs are empty and they go straight to your bloodstream.

Carb Cutting Secret #8: Mushrooms

Use baked or grilled portobellas as a bun for sandwiches and burgers. Mushrooms are an adult food—their earthy flavor and texture are for a sophisticated palate—and most of us never get much past white button mushrooms. But some of the other common varieties of these fascinating fungi are full of health benefits and worth experimenting with, such as: chanterelles, crimini, shiitake, oyster, enoki, portabello, porcini, and morel.

Research suggests that mushrooms may have anti-cancer properties, thanks to their rich array

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of phytochemicals and unique nutrient profile. One important way mushrooms contribute to health is that they are the only plant food that contains vitamin D, the spotlight nutrient of the year.

Here are other ways to use mushrooms to crank up the health quotient of your meal and deliver one-of-a-kind flavor: Use a medley of sauteed mushrooms for half of the breading in stuffing; add finely chopped mushrooms to chicken, tuna, and other salads; and add finely chopped, sauteed mushrooms to ground beef in a recipe for pasta sauce, chili, tacos, or burritos.

Don't go telling all our secrets now. (Just kidding! Tell everyone.) 