

Carb Confusion

BY LESLEY MAXWELL

Do you want to know my secret? It's a little method I use that has enabled me to stay in great shape all year round. It's something that keeps the soft body fat from my hips and butt. It's my 'One Carb @ a Time' philosophy which takes the guesswork out of the carb debate.

Are carbs making us fat and do we need them? The answer is yes and yes! I call it 'carb confusion'!

According to Australia's new dietary guidelines¹, adults are recommended to eat 5-6 serves of vegetables per day. Also, they recommend six serves of grains per day. So far there's nothing really wrong with this - right? Or maybe there is!

We all know that eating our vegetables is a good thing - but are all vegetables created equal?

Looking at the pretty picture on the dietary guidelines poster, unless you know better all the vegetables of choice are of equal nutritional value. Sweet corn, potatoes, pumpkin, tomatoes, avocado, legumes and pulses are all included as 'vegetables'. So you can choose any six.

Can I just be a little picky here and mention that if you were to choose sweet corn and potato as your 'vegetables', you would be choosing different nutritional values to someone who opts for a leafy green salad or vegetables and includes slices of avocado as their 'good fat' for part of a meal. Does this mean that, given the choice, the general population will also include potatoes and pumpkin as part of their 'vegetable quota' for the day plus the recommended serves of grains? What you eat plays a whopping 80% part in the results of your health and fitness goals, so it's well worth taking note and being aware.

Firstly, before we begin to analyse our vegetables, may I mention that all vegetables (and fruit) are a carbohydrate - which I'm sure you already knew. However, some vegetables contain more fibre and others more carbohydrates. Look closely to see how you can enjoy the best of both worlds.



Photo of Lesley - Andrew K

Which is Which?

I always consider sweet corn as a grain and not a vegetable, although it's technically a fruit until it's been dried and then it's classified as a grain. Wait a minute - this is getting really confusing! How can one plant be a fruit, vegetable and a grain all at once, and what part should it play in my diet?

To make things even more confusing, tomatoes are also a fruit - along with avocados which I personally use as a 'good fat'. Avocados contain an abundance of plant-based monounsaturated fats that play a vital role in the reduction of LDL (bad) cholesterol. Everyone should include some avocado in their diet but it shouldn't be counted as a vegetable choice for a meal - rather a 'good fat'.

Where do Legumes and Pulses fit in?

Looking more closely at the vegetable choices, legumes and pulses are also included as a vegetable and, although they may have a place in your diet, I would never recommend they replace leafy greens as your vegetable because of the high carbohydrate content.

For example, one cup of cooked lentils contains approximately 40g of carbohydrates - almost the same as a cup of cooked rice, whereas a cup of cooked leafy greens contains around 4g of carbohydrates. This means that lentils have TEN times the amount of carbohydrates in comparison to the cooked greens! So if you chose lentils as your 'vegetable' for that meal, along with some rice as your carbohydrate choice, you would be having a double whammy of carbs.

Now, I'm not expecting anyone to measure every gram of food they eat, but once you become aware of what you are eating

in the way of 'macros' it makes keeping your weight and health so much easier to maintain.

We do need a certain amount of carbs to remain healthy - but not all at once. The carbohydrates we don't use up almost immediately for energy get stored as you know what: soft body fat around our hips and thighs.

I do use legumes occasionally as a carbohydrate with my meal, which would also contain a form of complete protein such as fish or chicken plus a leafy green. Although vegetarians use legumes for their protein intake, you have to eat quite a few to acquire enough protein, thus increasing your daily intake of carbohydrates. A final note on legumes is that they do not contain all essential amino acids like animal proteins, so therefore aren't considered a complete protein.

Potatoes and sweet potato contain approximately the same amount of carbohydrates as cooked rice. Because potatoes are more than 92% carbohydrates - in the form of sugar and

starch - I would definitely recommend choosing these as your carbohydrate choice for a meal and not add any grain to your meal when eating potatoes.

Please don't get me wrong; I'm saying eat some carbs, but once again I'm reminding you that you probably don't need any more than one carbohydrate (apart from fibrous ones) at any given meal.

To keep me in great shape all year I follow my 'One Carb @ a Time' philosophy. This means I don't include any more than one (starchy) carb at any given meal. However, I usually include one carbohydrate whether from a starchy vegetable such as sweet potato, a pulse such as lentils, or a grain - but never more than one at the same time. Of course, I always include leafy greens (fibrous carbs) with all meals. You can make a vast difference to your weight if you are a little more selective about the veggies you are actually eating.

Once you learn how to divide your vegetables up in to categories, it tends to make more sense and you will look at your veggie choice differently.

Leafy vegetables have the least amount of carbohydrates and contain so much fibre with little or no effect on raising your blood sugar levels (which is a good thing). Leafy greens

have enormous amounts of vitamin K which can help protect against cancer and heart disease plus other vitamins and minerals. I bet you didn't know they also contain essential oils too! Examples of the leaf family are lettuce (however, I don't recommend iceberg as it has no nutritional value), spinach, Swiss chard, silver beet and fresh herbs. You can eat these until your heart's content and they will have no effect on adding excess weight but will add fibre to your diet and keep you feeling full.

Don't forget about adding some broccoli to your meals too; broccoli can provide you with some special cholesterol-lowering benefits and has a positive impact on our body's detoxification system plus has a healthy dose of vitamin A and K.

Love your leafy greens at any time, and enjoy your legumes, potatoes and grains - but not all at once. You can slow the digestion of carbs with a certain amount of good fats and protein - but that's another story!

¹www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/publications/n55



For more secrets and my 'One Carb @ a Time' philosophy, check out my book *Get the Body you Want* available at iTunes and www.ouifitness.com.au

