

Delicious Low-Carb Cooking

In This Chapter

- ◆ Anything but boring low-carb recipes
- ◆ Accommodating your daily carb allotment
- ◆ Counting carbs and the glycemic index

By the time you find this book, you are on a quest. You are committed to eating low carb. This dietary plan is supposed to be good for what seems to be ailing you. People choose low-carb eating as a solution to weight loss, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart conditions, autoimmune diseases, and even depression and anxiety. Low-carb eating works.

However, the dietary limitations of low-carb eating can get very boring really fast. Fortunately, boring eating is not a requirement for eating low carb. Just the opposite can be true. In fact, the opposite has to be true for a person to eat low carb day in and day out over years, in fact, over a lifetime.

As members of the human species, we are programmed biologically to seek out delicious and interesting foods. The good news is, you've found them. With these recipes, you can prepare fabulous dishes for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. They definitely will keep you from ailing with food boredom.

The Carb Count Limit

What constitutes low-carb eating varies with the experts. What we know is that you have to eat some carbs to stay happy and healthy. But the answer to how many isn't clear. The range of acceptable daily amounts swings from 15 to 250, depending on the expert.

Dr. Atkins, who led the movement to eating virtually no carbohydrates, suggested a person start his or her diet by eating only 15 to 20 grams carbohydrates a day for several weeks and slowly adding more, working up to a maintenance level of between 25 and 90. He advised that the maintenance level of carbohydrate intake is determined by the dieter's individual resistance to weight loss. The higher the resistance, the lower the carbohydrate maintenance allotment needs to be.



Low-Carb Vocab

The **low-carb spreadsheet** shows the nutri-

tional count of each recipe so that you can easily plan your eating for a meal, a day, or a week. Use the spreadsheet so you can stay within your carbohydrate allotment.

Other more moderate plans suggest a daily carbohydrate intake of 90 to 100 grams. Another recommends between 125 to 180 grams per day. The most liberal suggests that eating up to 250 grams is fine.

Whatever you choose, we offer you not only recipes but also meal plans to meet your needs. In Appendix C, you will find a *low-carb spreadsheet* listing each recipe in order of the number of carbohydrates per serving. We have also sorted the recipes by main dish, side dish, and dessert, so you can use the spreadsheet to plan a meal or a whole day's worth of meals.

Carb Count Consensus

We calculated the carbohydrate counts of the recipes using the highly reliable sources of the USDA's Nutrient Database and Corinne T. Netzer's *The Complete Book of Food Counts*.

But calculating the carbohydrate count of a recipe isn't precise and exact. The carbohydrate count of an orange depends on where it was grown and how long it was ripened on the vine. A medium orange is an inexact description at best. How thick is the skin? How much actual fruit is in the orange? We don't have any way of knowing these things. So we calculated based on averages.

If you use the amounts of ingredients specified in the recipes and eat the recommended serving amounts or less, you will be eating low carb.

The Bottom Line on Carbohydrates

At the beginning of each recipe, we tally up for you the full carbohydrate count of each serving. However, dietary fiber, which is non-nutritive, is also included in the carbohydrate count available in the reference books. To give you a more accurate carbohydrate count, we have subtracted out the fiber grams to give you the true bottom line.

For example, the carbohydrate count of $\frac{1}{4}$ cup pecans is 5 grams, and the fiber content is also 5 grams. The *nutritive carbohydrate count* of pecans is 0 grams.

For chocolate chips, though, 16 chips have 9 grams carbohydrates, but only 1 gram fiber, so the nutritive carbohydrate count of the chips is 8 grams.



Low-Carb Vocab

The **nutritive carbohydrate count** is the actual amount of carbohydrates in a serving. You calculate this by subtracting the amount of dietary fiber in grams from the carbohydrate count of the serving.

Not Going to Extremes

Beware of eating plans that are no carb or virtually no carb. Eating that way for more than a couple weeks can jeopardize your health. You need carbohydrates for your health. They aren't bad for you; in fact, many forms of them are positively wonderful for you. But too much of anything isn't a good thing.

As a nation and now as a world, we are overdoing the carbohydrates. Every fast-food restaurant, virtually every processed food at the store, and every pizza joint loads us up with carbohydrates. Bread sticks, bagels, hamburger buns, french fries, and thick crusts go down so easily and wreak havoc with our weight and our blood sugar levels.

The middle ground is somewhere in between. Eat enough carbohydrates for your health but not so much that you blimp up ... or worse. Your body needs the carbohydrates in vegetables and fruits. Our government recommends that we eat a minimum of 5 and preferably 10 servings of fruits or vegetables a day.



Hot Potato

No-carb and very low-carb diets can be harmful to your health. You could be at risk for reduced kidney function by damaging your kidneys. If you have a history of low kidney function or have high blood pressure, diabetes, or are older than age 65, you are most at risk.

You can meet these recommendations eating low carb, but it is virtually impossible to do this eating no carb. Check out the vegetable, side salads, and fruit chapters. We placed special emphasis on making sure you can prepare fabulous vegetable and fruit side dishes that give your body the vitamins, phytonutrients, and antioxidants it needs.

Not All Carbs Are Created Equal

Years and years ago, when people, mostly dieters, started counting carbohydrates, it was easy. Plenty of carbohydrate counter books listed the counts. Dieters would plan their eating day simply by adding up carbs. If they wanted to eat a donut, they could, without guilt, simply by rearranging their feeding plan for the day.

Things aren't so easy today because we know more, much more. We know that fruits and vegetables are friends. We know we need to eat 5 to 10 servings of fruits and vegetables a day for health and well-being, not to mention dietary fiber.

We also know that not all carbohydrates are created equal. A donut is quite different than broccoli in how a person's blood sugar levels get stimulated. So counting carbohydrates gets a bit messy, if you will. Here's what you need to know:



Low-Carb Vocab

The **glycemic index** is the measurement of how fast

a specific carbohydrate causes a rise in a person's blood sugar level. The higher the number on the glycemic index, the faster the rise in blood sugar. You can get a complete list at www.mendosa.com/gilists.htm.

- ◆ A carb is still a carb, and you count carb grams the same as before.
- ◆ The quality of the food containing the carbohydrates may change which foods you choose to eat. This is called the *glycemic index*.

The glycemic index is a compilation of how different carbs affect a person's body. Actual scientific studies were conducted on hundreds of people. They were given different carbs to eat, and afterward, their blood sugar levels were tested.

The studies showed that some carbs made blood sugar levels spike. They are called high glycemic. And some didn't; those are called low glycemic. Some carbs are moderate glycemic because they raised blood sugar levels somewhat but didn't spike them. The carbohydrates that didn't spike blood sugar levels, the low-glycemic ones, are the best carbs to eat.



Table Talk

When a person eats a high-glycemic food, blood sugar spikes. As a result, the pancreas gland, in a sense, overreacts and secretes more insulin than the body needs to lower the blood sugar. Leftover insulin causes the body to store yet more fat and makes the person hungry again soon afterward.

Low-glycemic carbohydrates are beneficial for those interested in eating low carb for weight loss, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and so on.

Glycemic Index in Short

The glycemic index only measures foods that are carbohydrates, so you won't find meat or fats in the glycemic index list. The following categories are based on the general ranking of carbohydrates according to the glycemic index. For the sake of simplicity, we have categorized carbohydrates into four broad categories to help explain the glycemic index.

- ◆ Highest in the glycemic index ranking are starches that include wheat, rice, corn, white potatoes, and products made from them such as bagels, cereal, and pastas. These products range from about 70 up to 165 and are considered high glycemic. Sweet potatoes and yams aren't included here, as their glycemic index count is low.
- ◆ Sugars are rated lower, with sucrose, or table sugar, at 68. Sugars are considered moderate glycemic. This category includes natural sugars such as honey and molasses. These range from about 56 to 69 and are considered medium glycemic.
- ◆ Fruits are considered low- to moderate-glycemic foods. This group includes apples, berries, oranges, peaches, pears, and other fruits, and rates range from about 30 to 50. Fifty-five or less is considered low glycemic.
- ◆ Vegetables are generally considered low glycemic and range from about 10 to 40. Broccoli, green beans, yams, sweet potatoes, cauliflower, and most other vegetables are in this group.

The carbohydrates with the lowest numbers are best to eat. They help keep your blood sugar on an even keel. So broccoli is better than a donut, table sugar is better than a bagel, an apple is better than sugar, etc., even if the carb counts are exactly the same. Often the lower-glycemic foods have more nutritional value.

For day-to-day eating, choose from fruits and vegetables and perhaps a bit of sugar. Save the starches for eating only occasionally, if at all. You can find a short list of the glycemic index of some ingredients in this book in Appendix B.

Cooking Low Glycemic

The glycemic index is brilliant in that it's comprised of experiments done on actual people. It shows how different carbohydrates actually affect the body. No prior studies have quantified results like the glycemic index has. The studies have required lots of effort over years with willing volunteers.

The glycemic index works for individual foods such as rice, but it doesn't work for combinations of foods. The very fact that the foods are combined changes the way the body reacts to them. For instance, we know that if you combine rice with a fat, such as butter, the glycemic count of the rice is lower than before. We know that if you make a brownie recipe with 5 eggs and ½ pound butter, the affect of the sugar in the brownie isn't the same as if a person ate the same amount of sugar all by itself. The eggs and butter lower the glycemic effect of the sugar. If a meal contains an acidic-tasting food, like a vinaigrette salad dressing, the glycemic index effect of the whole meal is lower.

What we don't know is by how much. The only way to know the glycemic count of a recipe, that is, of a combination of ingredients, is to run the same scientific tests. We didn't do that for this cookbook. No one, as of today, knows how to compute the glycemic index of a recipe without doing elaborate tests on willing volunteers over years.

We believe we would've had plenty of willing volunteers to test the recipes in this book. The food is that good. But we didn't have years and years for the study because we wanted to get this book into your hands right away.

This is our solution for using the glycemic index. We chose to use ingredients that are mostly low to moderate glycemic, with a bias toward low glycemic. For example, we offer you recipes for baked yams but not for white potatoes. In the bread recipes, we use very little wheat but include other low-glycemic flours and proteins.

The ingredients in the recipes, for the most part, are already low glycemic. So you can make these recipes knowing that your eating is comfortably low to moderate glycemic.

The Least You Need to Know

- ◆ Eating comfort foods makes for successful low-carb eating.
- ◆ Blending carbohydrate counts with glycemic index information best supports your health and weight loss efforts.
- ◆ Calculating carbohydrate counts is inexact but close.
- ◆ The nutritive carbohydrate count gives you the true bottom line on carbs.
- ◆ Eating the serving size amount listed with each recipe helps you calculate an accurate carb count.