

## Healthier RTE: Better Carbohydrates



Busy families and office workers enjoy the simplicity and convenience of ready-to-eat (RTE) meals. RTE meal provides an easy way to save time and energy on busy weeknights but not all of them meet the requirements which your body requires. They are mostly loaded with carbohydrates and perhaps have gotten a bad rep over the years especially with the buzz of the trendy ketogenic diet.

Carbohydrates are an essential part of a healthy diet, known as an umbrella term that encompasses sugar, fruits, vegetables, fibers, and legumes<sup>7</sup>. Adults should consume 45–65% of their total calories from carbohydrates. It provides the body with glucose, which is converted to energy used to support body functions and physical activity<sup>13</sup>. Many consumers are now aware that they should include higher quality carbohydrates in their diet and the image of whole grains as a better choice is now firmly established in consumers' mind<sup>9</sup>.

## Quinoa

Quinoa is a highly nutritious pseudo-grain due to its outstanding protein quality and wide range of minerals and vitamins<sup>12</sup>. Quinoa is a rich source of carbohydrates and is one of the rare plants which have all 9 essential amino acids and highest protein content in all cereals<sup>11</sup>. Thanks to its high fibre content and low glycemic index, it has been linked to weight loss and healthy living<sup>1</sup>. Adding fibre-rich foods like quinoa into your diet can promote satiety and help support digestive health by promoting regular bowel movements and fueling beneficial bacteria in the gut<sup>2,3,5</sup>. Since quinoa is so versatile, there are many ways to incorporate it into RTE meals, especially as a better-for-you substitute in place of potatoes, rice, and other starchy sides.

## Oat

Oat is a good source of carbohydrates and quality protein with excellent amino acid profile. It also contains much higher levels of lipids than other cereals which are excellent sources of energy and unsaturated fatty acids<sup>10</sup>. As for the micronutrients, oats are particularly rich in potassium. The distinguishing feature of oats is its rich content of dietary fibre, especially soluble  $\beta$ -glucans<sup>15</sup>. Oat  $\beta$ -glucans has been studied extensively for its effects on heart health and cholesterol levels, as well as blood glucose regulation<sup>8,14</sup>. Oats are made to oatmeal cup which is a filling breakfast that is ready to eat on your way to work, after your morning workout, or at the office in less than a minute.

## Choosing Healthier Carbs<sup>6</sup>

<i>Instead of..</i>	<i>Try..</i>
White rice	Brown rice, quinoa, riced cauliflower
White potatoes (including fries and mashed potatoes)	Cauliflower mash, sweet potato
Regular pasta	Whole-wheat pasta, spaghetti squash
White bread	Whole-wheat or whole-grain bread
Sugary breakfast cereal	High-fibre, low-sugar cereal
Instant oatmeal	Steel-cut or rolled oats
Cornflakes	Low-sugar bran flakes
Sugary fruit juices	Whole Fruits

### Follow these recommendations,

In other words, it is recommended to limit high processed foods, refined simple sugars which provide calories but has minimal nutrition. Get more complex carbohydrates and healthy nutrients by eating more fruits and vegetables. Lastly, focus on whole-grain rice, breads and cereals, and legumes like beans, lentils and dried peas<sup>4</sup>. However, balance is key. Your body needs a variety of nutritious foods to get all the necessary nutrients – not just carbohydrates. Read the food label and pairing foods with healthy carbs with other nutrient-dense foods will enable you to choose a healthier RTE meal options so you can save time without it being a detriment to your health.

## References

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