Let's talk about...

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates are the body's quickest source of energy. They provide foods with flavor, sweetness and structure.

Key Facts

- **Primary source of energy for the body**
- **Complex carbohydrate sources include fruits, whole grains and non-starchy vegetables**
- **The body converts excess carbohydrates into fat**

Key Benefits

- **Carbohydrates fuel the body during day-to-day activities**
- **Complex unprocessed carbohydrates supply sustained energy**
- **Simple processed carbohydrates supply quick energy**
- **Both forms of carbohydrates improve performance and accelerate post-workout recovery**

Carbohydrates are generally long chains of sugar molecules that are broken down into glucose, enter the bloodstream, and ultimately reach muscle cells to create energy for the body.

The Glycemic Index (GI) measures how fast carbohydrates from a particular food are converted to glucose and enter the bloodstream. Fast release (known as high GI) carbs, such as sports drinks, rice and watermelon, supply short bursts of energy. Slow release (known as low GI) carbs, such as skim milk, apples and beans, deliver a steady supply of energy. Athletes have special needs for both fast- and slow-release carbohydrates. Proper fueling during exercise has been shown to improve performance and accelerate recovery after a workout.

Carbohydrates are often categorized as "simple" or "complex," depending on the length of the sugar chains. Larger, complex carbohydrate molecules take the body longer to break down, thus providing sustained energy. Complex carbohydrate sources often contain fiber, and some dietary fiber sources slow digestion, providing a lasting feeling of fullness. Examples of these sources include whole grain breads and pastas, fruits, non-starchy vegetables and whole grains, such as brown rice, oats and quinoa.

Simple carbohydrate molecules can be broken down easily by the body for fast energy. However, not using that energy right away can cause fluctuations in blood sugar and leave you feeling hungry and tired.

Eating too few carbohydrates forces your body to make glucose from other body tissues, such as muscle. However, excess carbohydrates not needed for immediate energy are stored as fat, so it's important to monitor your intake.

Did You Know?

A medium-sized white potato, with its 220 calories of pure carbohydrate, can raise blood sugar as fast as a cola drink! For a healthier choice, try sweet potatoes!