

Favorite Food Makeovers

With a pinch of creativity, transform your go-to comfort foods into healthy eats by cutting carbs.
By Lynn Prowitt

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 **35 g 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 (6 g of carbs per cup), which shaves your total carb countdown to **20 g 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 these.

Add a mixture of one-half part softened butter and one-half part 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, exercise caution before consuming chowders. Depending upon the amount of potatoes or corn used, one cup of chowder could have as much as **50 g 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 20 g of carbs in one-half cup, 8 of which are fiber grams), and have a lower glycemic index than some other legumes.

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. Cook uncovered until veggies are tender.

Bread

White bread, as we all know, is the quintessential enemy of good blood glucose 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 wheat flour. This anti-glycemic effect can even last through to the next meal. (Lactic acid isn't the only thing that helps keep blood glucose in check. The acetic acid in vinegar and the citric acid in lemons and limes has the same effect.)

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 **20 g 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.

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 **60 g of carbs**. Since white potatoes can increase

blood glucose more dramatically than even table sugar, and french fries usually come out of a commercial deep fryer, you're wise to avoid them as much as possible.

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 **27 g of carbs and 4 g of fiber**. The same amount of jicama contains only about **12 g of carbs**.

Peel sweet potatoes, 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 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 **59 g of carbs**.

Carb-Cutting Secret #6: Whole Grains

The obvious better choice is brown rice, which is a whole grain containing 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. Keep portions very small, though; brown rice is not a low-glycemic food, and contains about **46 g of carbs in one cup**. (The whole grain with the lowest glycemic impact is barley.)

Succotash

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

Sandwich or Burger Bun

A standard hard roll is made with enriched white flour and contains about **30 g 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 portobellos 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: chanterelles, crimini, shiitake, oyster, enoki, portobello, porcini, and morel.

Research suggests that mushrooms may have anti-cancer properties, thanks to their rich array of phytochemicals and unique nutrient profile. One important way mushrooms contribute to health is that they are the only plant food containing vitamin D, one of the essential nutrients recently added to new food label.

Here are some 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 sautéed mushrooms for half of the breading in stuffing; add finely-chopped mushrooms to chicken, tuna, and other salads; and add finely-chopped, sautéed mushrooms to ground beef in a recipe for pasta sauce, chili, tacos, or burritos.

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