

Carb Rules for Bodybuilders

If you ask 20 bodybuilders about carb intake, you will likely get 20 different theories. Suffice it to say, there is a wide variety of opinion on how to manipulate carbs properly to either gain mass or lose fat. To get a handle on this controversial subject, I have compiled a list of facts, tips and suggestions to allow you to gain mass without adding unwanted fat.

1. Eat complex carbs

Carbohydrates should comprise the bulk of your daily caloric intake because they form muscle glycogen - the fuel for arduous training sessions. Focus on unprocessed complex carbohydrates like yams, potatoes, whole grain breads, oatmeal and brown rice. Why? These natural complex carbs are made of long chains of sugar and are digested very slowly. Slow burning carbs promoted consistent blood sugar levels, which help to offset fatigue while promoting the release of insulin - the body's principal anabolic hormone. Men can project daily carb intake, in grams (g) by multiplying their bodyweight by three; women should multiply bodyweight by two. For example, a 200 pound man should consume 600g of carbs daily, while a 125 pound woman should consume 250g.

2. Eat fiber

Benefits of fiber include making muscle tissue more responsive to anabolism by improving sugar and amino acid uptake, and aiding in muscle glycogen formation and growth. Beans and oatmeal are two excellent sources of fiber.

3. Stagger your carb intake

Divide your carb meals into six distinct servings throughout the day. This divide and conquer approach stimulates a steady release of insulin to create an anabolic (muscle building) state. If you eat too many carbs in one sitting, the net effect is that fat-storing enzymes kick into high gear and you lose that lean and hard look.

4. Eat simple carbs after training

Honey, sugar and refined foods such as white bread and white rice - typical simple carbs - are digested quickly and easily. The resulting insulin spike is a double-edged sword, however. After training, it can prevent muscle catabolism while promoting anabolism. If you have not been working out, the intake of simple carbs can stimulate fat storage.

5. Eat more carbs after training

This edict is the corollary to tip #4. A high carb intake at your post training meal will have less chance of being stored as fat, as carbs must replenish depleted glycogen levels before they gain the ability to stimulate fat storage. Eat about 25% of your daily carbs at this meal.

6. Eat a carb loaded breakfast

Besides the post training meal, breakfast is the other golden time to ingest carbs, because blood sugar and muscle glycogen levels are low from your overnight fast. Your body must replenish these levels before stimulating the fat storing machinery in the body.

7. Use supplements to assist carbs with insulin utilization

Chromium, Omega-3 fatty acids, Vitamin E and Alpha Lipoic Acid all increase a muscle's ability to use insulin. Supplement your breakfast with 200 micrograms of Chromium, four grams of Omega-3s and 100 milligrams of Alpha Lipoic Acid.

8. Minimize fruit intake

Though low in calories and rich in vitamins, fruit is problematic for dieting bodybuilders for one reason: it contains fructose, a simple sugar, which is converted into glycogen in the liver. There, it can be readily used as a building block for fat synthesis.

9. Avoid carbs after hours

Unless you are blessed with a superfast metabolism, you should forget about eating baked potatoes late at night. Late night carbs interfere with the release of growth hormone and promote fat storage while you sleep.

10. Mix carbs and protein in the same meal

Combining carbs and proteins minimizes the risk of carbs being stored as fat. Eating protein with carbs facilitates the transport of amino acids from protein foods into the muscles to trigger new growth.

11. Rotate carbs for fat loss

Bodybuilders who rotate their carb intake tend to lose more fat than bodybuilders who maintain a steady flow of carbs while dieting. For example, instead of eating 600g of carbs every day (the typical daily total for a 200 pound bodybuilder), try varying the volume of intake. Eat 50% fewer carbs (300g) for two days, then the standard 600g for the next two days, then 50% more (900g) for the next two days. The total carb intake is the same, but this schedule works because it lowers muscle glycogen in the first stage (promoting fat loss), and then increases insulin levels (ensuring no loss of muscle) on the final two days. Carb rotation gives you the best of both worlds: decreased fat with no loss of muscle.