



Keeping to a healthy lifestyle is vital to improving our health and general well-being. This is particularly true if we are trying to manage our body weight or blood sugar levels. Our understanding of healthy eating has changed substantially over the last few decades. Research of Glycaemic Index (GI) has changed the way we think about diet and carbohydrate-containing foods. Estonie Yuen Wing Ting, Dietitian, National Healthcare Group Polyclinics, reports.

Carbohydrates are an essential part of our diet, as they are one of the body's major sources of energy. Carbohydrate foods are those that contain starches or sugars – e.g. rice, noodles, bread, cereals, starchy vegetables (potato, sweet potato, corn etc.), fruits, legumes, milk and yoghurt. They are digested to form glucose (sugar), which is then absorbed into the bloodstream.

The Highs and Lows of Glycaemic Index

The Glycaemic Index (GI) is a numerical way of describing how much the carbohydrate in individual foods affects blood sugar levels. It is a ranking of carbohydrate foods from 1-100, according to the rate at which they are broken down and absorbed into the bloodstream.

Foods that are broken down slowly are considered to have low GI and have a ranking between 0 and 55. Low GI foods produce relatively small fluctuations in blood sugar levels. High GI foods (those ranked between 70 and 100) will cause a rapid rise in blood sugar levels.


The GI values of some food items are listed in the table below.

Low GI (55 or less)	Moderate GI (56-69)	High GI (70 or more)
Rice & Alternatives Rolled oats Multigrain breads Spaghetti, macaroni Long grain rice (Mahatma) Semolina	Rice & Alternatives Natural muesli Wholemeal bread Dried rice noodles Basmati rice, wild rice	Rice & Alternatives Rice Bubbles, Corn Flakes, Coco Pops White bread, English muffin Jasmine rice Tapioca
Vegetables Sweet corn	Vegetables Sweet potato	Vegetables Most other potatoes
Dairy Products Yoghurt, milk, ice cream (choose low fat varieties)		
***Sugar Fructose	***Sugar Sucrose, honey	**Sugar Glucose, jelly beans

*** All sugars contain the same amount of energy. Limit as part of a healthy diet.

What about fruits? They are part of our healthy balanced diet and they contain plenty of essential vitamins; in general they are low-moderate GI. Fruits that should be limited are fruits canned in syrup and dried fruits



The Glycaemic Index is a numerical way of describing how much the carbohydrate in individual foods affects blood sugar levels. It is a ranking of carbohydrate foods from 1-100, according to the rate at which they are broken down and absorbed into the bloodstream. 

Why choose low GI foods?

Including low GI foods in a healthy, well-balanced diet can provide many health benefits. A low GI diet can:

- Help you feel fuller for longer by reducing the appetite between meals
- Assist in maintaining a healthy weight
- Reduce the risk of developing Type II diabetes and heart disease
- Helps people with diabetes to control blood sugar levels, in particular, with the aid of soluble fibre which slows the release of glucose from carbohydrates into the bloodstream.

GI should not be used alone to determine if you should eat the particular food. You should also consider:

- The fat content of foods (For examples, potato chips and chocolate have a low GI but are high in fat!)
- The amount of food that you eat
- Having a healthy balanced diet, that is, to consume a **variety** of foods **balanced** by a **moderate** intake of each food



