

Carbs: How Much is Enough?

By *Laurel-Lea Shannon*

www.womenscycling.ca



In “[Good Carb, Bad Carb](#)” you learned how to tell the difference between healthy carbs, like fruits and vegetables, and not-so-healthy carbs, like processed white bread and bagels. And how eating lower GI carbs keeps you healthier. But how many carbs does it take to fuel your daily activities?

[Christine Gerbstadt](#), a sports dietitian and spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association, recommends that 45 to 55 percent of your calorie intake be from carbohydrates. “Studies show that carbohydrates from mixed sources provide the best sources of energy for exercise. This is true especially for longer endurance cycling. You don’t need commercial products. Real foods meet all these requirements. Examples include whole grains, fruit, honey, and other complex carbohydrates that are easily digested,” says Gerbstadt.

Even active cyclists can end up carrying a spare tire or other unwanted fat by eating the wrong kinds of carbs and too many of them. To prevent that, there’s a way to calculate how many carbohydrates you need to fuel your rides. “Female cyclists’ carbohydrate intake should be around 1 gram carbohydrate per kilogram bodyweight per hour (of activity) from carbohydrate-rich foods or fluids providing a mix of carbohydrates,” says Gerbstadt.

A woman who weighs 120lbs. (54 kg) will need to eat approximately 216 calories each hour on a 2-hour ride. This is how to do the calculation:

$$120 \div 2.2 = 54 \text{ kilograms (weight in kilograms)}$$

$$54 \times 2 \text{ hours} = 108 \text{ grams of carbohydrate for a 2-hour ride}$$

108 x 4 = 432 calories (1 gram carbohydrate = 4 calories) for a 2-hour ride or 216 calories per hour

Is that easy or what? When you're out riding, just eat what you need to fuel your ride and have a small post-ride snack. Any more and you risk weight gain.

But wait. It's actually a bit more complicated than that because how much energy you burn on the bike also depends on how hard you ride. Now we're into METS (metabolic equivalents), which measure the energy cost of an activity based on effort. It's enough to make your head swim. So we'll leave that for another day.