What is a carbohydrate?
Carbohydrates are one of three macronutrients: carbohydrate, protein and fat. They contain carbon, hydrogen and oxygen atoms. Carbohydrates provide most of the energy needed in our daily lives, both for normal body functions such as heart-beat, breathing and digestion and for physical activity and exercise.

Which foods contain carbohydrates?
- Grains and grain products
- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Beans and legumes
- Dairy products
- Sugars

Do I need carbs?
High-carbohydrate foods are the best and sometimes only food sources of many essential nutrients, including:
- Fiber
- Vitamins C & E
- The majority of B vitamins
- Carotenoids and other beneficial phytochemicals
- Potassium
- The majority of trace minerals

A diet that is low in or deficient in any of these nutrients leads to many health problems, including increased risk for osteoporosis, high blood pressure and heart disease.

Are high-carbohydrate diets fattening?
Not necessarily. Obesity is uncommon in Asia where most people eat a very-high-carbohydrate diet. But not all high-carbohydrate foods are created equal. Some, such as whole grains, potatoes, fruits and vegetables, actually help you eat fewer calories without hunger.

What should I eat if I want to lose weight?
You should eat more fruits and vegetables, especially non-starchy vegetables like lettuce, broccoli, tomatoes and spinach. You should also try to eat grains that are in a more whole, unprocessed state like the ones listed in the “skinny” carb list. Get 2-3 servings of nonfat milk or yogurt for calcium. Choose high-protein foods that are good for your heart, like beans, nuts, fish and white poultry without the skin. If you eat meat, choose lean cuts and limit portions to 3 ounces or less. Cook and eat with minimal fat.

Not All Carbs Are Equal
Take a look at our lists below. The numbers show how many calories each food contains per pound so you can compare them for calorie density. Nonstarchy vegetables, such as lettuce, tomatoes and carrots, are the lowest in calories while foods that contain fat are the highest.

“Skinny” Carbohydrates:
- Vegetables, nonstarchy 195
- Fruits 135-425
- Skim milk 158
- Hot cereals, cooked 242-281
- Brown rice, cooked 488
- Potatoes, yams 494
- Barley, cooked 557
- Whole-wheat spaghetti 562
- Beans, boiled 576

Calorie-Dense Foods:
These include foods that are high in sugar, refined grains and/or fat.
- Ice cream 1,283
- French fries 1,400
- Cake with frosting 1,544
- Pretzels 1,700
- Sweetened dry cereal 1,701
- Cheesecake 1,733
- Baked potato chips 1,760
- Doughnut 1,800
- Brownies, cookies 2,000
- Chocolate candy bar 2,163
- Chips, crackers 2,450

Some carb foods can be your best friends for weight loss.