

Understanding the glycemic index

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Most of us have heard of the glycemic index (GI), but do you know how you can use it to make smarter food choices?

The GI measures how quickly our bodies break down carbohydrates consumed into glucose that can be readily absorbed.

Ms Jaclyn Reutens, a dietitian with 13 years of experience said: "If a food raises your blood glucose level quickly, it is said to have a high GI, and food which causes a slow increase is said to have a low GI.

"The GI only applies to carbohydrate-based food and not protein-based food. Meat, chicken and fish do not have a GI."

What is food with low GI?

Generally, the higher the fibre content, the lower the GI.

Ms Reutens said: "Examples of food that have a lower GI include oatmeal, multigrain bread, barley, buckwheat

noodles, brown rice, basmati rice, sweet potato, beans and milk.

"Low GI food tends to be higher in fibre and contain more nutrients such as zinc, iron and potassium. These are essential for a healthy diet."

Diabetes and GI

Other than causing a slower rise in blood glucose, low GI food may delay hunger as it is more slowly broken down by our bodies.

Ms Reutens said: "Those with type 1 or type 2 diabetes need to be extra careful with the amount and type of carbohydrate consumed. This will affect the amount of insulin required for a person with type 1 diabetes, and the overall management of glucose control for a person with type 2 diabetes.

"For the average healthy person, knowing which foods lead to spikes in blood sugar levels and how they affect appetite is useful in maintaining overall good health and weight management."



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Cooking methods affect GI

How your food has been cooked has an effect on its GI.

Ms Reutens said: "The more processing a food has undergone and the more starches are broken down, the higher the GI.

"Pasta that has been cooked longer has a higher GI than al dente pasta. Similarly, mashed potato has a higher GI than a whole baked potato."

Fats and GI

Food with higher fat content has a lower GI than those with less lipids.

Ms Reutens said "Fats slow digestion and absorption, creating a falsely low GI.

"Exercise discretion and common sense when making dietary choices. If creamy pasta is said to have a lower GI than one with a less greasy sauce, be aware that creamy pasta cannot be healthier due to its higher fat content."

Note: This article provides general information and should not be constructed as medical advice or instruction. Always consult a doctor or healthcare professional on matters related to health or well-being.