

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Is Glycemic Index Worth It?

Looking at all the books in the bookstore you'd think that the Glycemic Index or GI has been proved beyond all doubt and is carved in stone as pure nutrition. But ask most dietitians and you might sense they're not quite so sure. Now, ask the doctors at Harvard and they're likely to tell you that it really doesn't make a lot of difference. In fact, that's what their most recent research just reported!

Glycemic Index is a measure of how fast your blood sugar is likely to go up after you eat a certain food. The more refined sugar, the faster it goes up. The more fiber in the food, the more slowly it goes up. That's the basic idea. The measures are all based on the effect of 2 slices of white bread, or 50 grams of white sugar, about a quarter of a cup. Everything is compared to one of these. Each food being tested should have the same amount of carbohydrate as these do.

White bread is given a GI of 100. If the food you're eating has a GI of 120 then your sugar will go up faster than if you ate white bread. If the food has a GI of 50 then it goes up much more slowly. That is as long as you eat the amount of other food that matches the carbs in a slice of bread.

But there are lots of other things that affect your sugar. For example, how the food was cooked makes a difference. A boiled potato, a baked potato and a dish of potato salad, each with the same amount of potato carbohydrate, can all have different GI numbers. If you eat the potato by itself or with something else will affect how fast your sugar shoots up. So that potato salad will not be the same as the boiled potato. How many of us eat just a plain boiled potato for dinner? Not many! And if you eat half the boiled potato while it's hot, but stick the other half in the refrigerator and eat it tomorrow, you'll get different numbers!

One other thing that the books usually don't mention when they talk about GI is how important the amount of food is. Remember, each food is supposed to have the same amount of carbohydrate. So the amounts of different foods will be different. For example, about half a pound, or a large baked potato has about the same amount of carbohydrate as 2 slices of bread. There are lots of people who will easily eat a large baked potato at a meal. But usually there is meat, sour cream, maybe a

beer with it. And all of those things will change the GI.

Then what about poor carrots? They have a bad name as having a high GI too. But to get the same amount of carbohydrate you'd need to eat over a pound of raw carrots. How often do you sit down and eat a pound of carrots at one meal?

Now this Harvard study is adding more questions to the pot. They gave people high or low GI diets for 5 weeks, then 2 weeks off the diet, then 5 more weeks of the other diet. Half the diets were high in carbs, half were low carbs in each GI category. Everyone got 2 of the diets. At the end, the people eating less carb had slightly better cholesterol, triglyceride and blood pressure levels, no change in insulin. It didn't matter whether their diets were high or low GI. And people on the low GI diets had no changes in cholesterol, blood pressure or insulin, and only slightly better triglycerides. The study is not perfect, but it does show that GI numbers are not the answer.

Eat a balanced diet with fruits, vegetables, whole grains and beans. They all have lots of fiber to slow down the blood sugar rise. Stay away from sugary foods and drinks. Those are all good recommendations for all of us, without a book of GI numbers to tell us which ones.

Here's a pretty salad that's super easy, so easy the kids will enjoy getting to slice the carrots and cucumbers. Enjoy it with any meal.

Green and Orange Ribbon Salad

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| 1 medium carrot | 1 medium cucumber |
| ½ tsp grated fresh lemon peel (zest) | 2 Tbsp lemon juice |
| 2 Tbsp sugar or sweetener equivalent | dash of hot sauce if desired |

Wash the vegetables and lemon. Use a vegetable peeler to peel the carrot and cucumber. Then keep using the peeler and cut them into long thin ribbons. When you get to the seeds in the cucumber turn it around and slice the other sides, but don't use the seedy part. Grate the lemon rind to make the zest, then squeeze out the juice. Add the zest, juice and sugar (and hot sauce if using) to the ribbons and toss to coat. Serves 4. It's best if eaten immediately.

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