Done with Dieting Podcast #14: The Truth about Carbs

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With your Host

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You are listening to the Done with Dieting Podcast Episode number 14.

Hi, I'm Elizabeth Sherman, former corporate high tech executive turn life and weight loss coach. But it wasn't that long ago that I was searching for that perfect diet, the one that would finally be the golden ticket to lose the weight that I so desired.

Fast forward past tons of failed diet attempts, exercise fads and painful lessons learned, and although I still have not reached the state of Nirvana, body love, my relationship with food exercise in my body is infinitely better than it was not only when I started this journey, but even as recently as three years ago.

The journey that has allowed me to ditch my scale, stop logging my food and exercise, eat food that I didn't prepare and easily maintain my weight - something that I never thought was possible for me.

I created the Done with Dieting podcast to give you simple, easy to do and sustainable strategies to help you do the same without all of the drama that I went through.

If you're a woman who's looking to create a better relationship with food and her body, get off the diet roller coaster and free up a bunch of headspace spent on calories, how you should look what you should eat and beating yourself up for not doing what you think you should be doing. You are in the right place.

Let's get started.

Hey, everyone, welcome to the show. So today I want to talk about carbs, carbohydrates. And I wanted to talk about carbs because we as a society have this love hate relationship with carbs, right?

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Everything that is so incredibly tasty is a carbohydrate. But at the same time, we're told that we don't want to eat carbs that carbs are bad, and that we need to stay away from them.

And so I wanted to take this time so that we could clear up some confusion about carbs, what exactly they are, how to use them for us how to eat them, and then not how to be afraid of them.

Because that's what we really want, right? We want to feel comfortable around them. And if we have this fear that they're going to make us fat, we don't feel at ease around them. Okay, so that's the goal for this episode.

Okay, so let's start out with the definition of what is a carbohydrate, I think we all have a really good idea of what carbohydrates are. However, in coming up with a definition, I decided to turn to the internet. Of course, if you do a search for what is the definition of a carbohydrate, you will come up with all of these very formal sounding definitions, but I think Web MD came up with the best one, and that is carbohydrates represent one of three main classes of foods. carbs are a source of energy. They are mainly sugars and starches that the body breaks down into glucose that the body uses to feed itself. Okay, so that's actually a really good definition.

The classes of foods that they're talking about are what we call macronutrients. And the body needs macronutrients. macronutrients are your proteins, your fats, and your carbohydrates. Because those are the things that give your body calories, and calories are what fuels your body.

Now, there are actually a fourth and fifth category of macronutrient. One is alcohol, alcohol has calories as well, we don't need them. But it does generally fit into the category of being a macronutrient. And then water is also a macronutrient. Even though it doesn't have any calories, we do need it in large quantities.

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And so at some point, carbs became bad for us, right? All of a sudden carbs were the enemy. And hopefully within this podcast episode will be able to differentiate between carbs that you want to eat more of, and carbs that you really want to eat less of. Because that's ultimately what it turns into being is there are carbs that are good for us that promote health. And there are curbs that we just want to eat in limited amounts.

When we think about carbs, there are a couple different categories of foods that are carbs.

And so let me preface this by saying we eat food, we don't eat macronutrients. When we eat food, that food is comprised of the different macronutrients, meaning that other than probably oils, each of our foods have different macronutrients. So when we look at a carrot, for example, that carrot has carbohydrates, but it also has water in it, it might have some protein, and it probably has a little bit of fat in it too. When we think about chicken, chicken has mainly protein, but it also has fat in it and a slight amount of carbohydrate.

So when we think about foods, I want you to not think about foods as their macronutrients, but that macronutrients kind of come along with the food that we eat, and I know that it's splitting hairs here, but no one food is good or bad, okay. And when we think about food as just food, then we start to appreciate the food for what it is. And we don't demonize food for what it's made of.

There's a continuum of carbohydrates. And let me just start out by saying that I really like to differentiate between two different types of carbs because not all carbs are bad.

Within my own practice and working with my clients. I like to differentiate between what I call starches and non starchy vegetables.

Okay, so let's talk about vegetables. Now, vegetables are carb, but we know that vegetables aren't bad for us, right? We know that vegetables are In fact, it really good for

us because vegetables have tons of vitamins and minerals for us. And those are the things that make our body work well.

Now, when we're thinking about vegetables, I want you to think of a continuum, right? So a line. And on one side, we have, let's say, the most healthy vegetable that there is. I don't know what that is. But let's say that it's spinach, or kale, or I don't know, broccoli, I don't know, just pick one.

And on the other side of the spectrum, we have, let's say, the most unhealthy vegetable that there is not that unhealthy vegetables exist, but let's just play a game right here. Again, I don't know what that is. And let's pretend maybe it's a white potato, for example.

When we look at this continuum of carbohydrates, somewhere in the middle, we can create a line between what we call non starchy vegetables and starchy vegetables. Now, the rough rule of thumb that I use with my clients in determining what a starchy vegetable versus a non starchy vegetable is, is how the vegetable grows. So starchy vegetables tend to grow below ground, whereas non starchy vegetables tend to grow above ground.

And also, let me put in a caveat here, that when I'm talking about vegetables, I'm talking about those things that we traditionally consider vegetables, like there's the whole argument about well is a tomato, a fruit or a vegetable. In this conversation here, I'm talking about all things that we consider vegetables, those things that aren't necessarily sweet. And so those things that are sweet, I'm going to call fruits.

Alright, so now that we have that definition out of the way, starches tend to grow below ground and non starchy vegetables tend to grow above ground. However, there are exceptions to that rule. For example, carrots tend to be non starchy when we eat them raw, but when we cook them, something happens to the properties of the fiber in the

carrot, and it makes them starchy onions, for example, grow below ground, but they really are not starchy. They're not influencing our blood sugar. And that's really what we're talking about here. We're talking about foods and how they influence our blood sugar, and therefore our insulin response. And I'm going to talk about this again a little bit later, but just hang on to that thought for right now.

Other things that we consider starchy, our winter squashes, things like spaghetti squash, butternut squash, acorn squash, zucchini, and yellow squash tend to be in the middle somewhere, and then peas tend to be in the middle.

And so when we're talking about this continuum of carbohydrates, over on one side where we have the most healthy vegetables, what we're looking at on that side is vegetables that are high in vitamins and minerals that are high in water content, and that are low in calories. And then on the other side, where we have the quote unquote, unhealthy vegetables as if there is something like that, right? those tend to be higher in calories, lower in water content, and lower in vitamins and minerals.

And so as we look at this spectrum of vegetables, what we want to do is we want to eat more of the vegetables that are on the one side, the less starchy stuff and as they become more starchy, we want to taper how much we consume of them in one meal. Okay.

Now, in addition to starchy vegetables, those vegetables that grow below ground, as well as winter squashes, we can also put into that same category, beans, lentils, grains, and fruits. And now again, I don't want you to feel like all of those things are bad. Beans are fantastic. I eat them almost every day, they have a ton of fiber in them, they are so good for you. In fact, everyone's body is completely different in terms of what starches their body does well on and which starches their body does not do well on.

So part of this is going to be an experiment for you figuring out which starches so does my body like beans? Does my body not like beans? Does my body like fruit? Does it not

like fruit, so on and so forth? So going through each of those different types of starches and figuring out how does my body thrive on needs, and then using that information to create the diet that is right for you and your body.

Okay, so let me come back to describing what these different categories are and which foods fall into them. rains tend to be things like flour, wheat, oats, quinoa, even though technically quinoa is a seed, couscous, pastas, breads, those tend to be grains. Corn is actually a grain, I know I'm gonna blow your mind with this one, corn is a grain, and so therefore it is starchy. It's one of the only grains that we eat fresh. And so it's kind of marketed to us that it's a vegetable, okay, but it is technically a grain now.

Now the other grouping of food that falls under this starch category is fruits. And in this case, we're talking about fruits that we typically consider to be sweet. And fruits have a huge continuum as well. So on one side, we have fruits that really are not very starchy things like apples, pears and berries, where you can probably eat a fair number of those and not affect your blood sugar levels. Where on the other side of the spectrum of fruits, we have things like tropical fruits, grapes, mango, pineapple, those things that are super sweet and delicious, but they do tend to be a little bit higher in sugars.

Now, what I see with a lot of my clients is that women will come to me and say, Oh, I eat my fruits and vegetables, when they're really eating a lot of fruit, and not as many vegetables. I just want you to be aware and I don't want you to be afraid of fruit. But I think that we need to limit fruit to a certain extent, especially if you are trying to lose weight.

And the rough rule of thumb that I have for my clients is that we want to eat about five servings of non starchy vegetables to every one serving of starchy foods. So things like starchy vegetables, grains, beans, legumes, as well as fruits. Now, what are we talking about when we're talking about portions, a serving of vegetables is about the size of your

fist. If it's a leafy green, then it's two fists precooked the portion of a starchy vegetable, including grains, fruits, beans, and lentils would fit in your hand that's cut.

Okay, so now at this point, I've really been talking about whole foods, right. And I think that where carbs really get a bad rap is when we start getting into the processed versions of them. Everything that I've talked about, up until this point has really been minimally processed foods, foods that really are pretty close to nature, it's when we get into processed carbohydrates, that then carbs tend to have a different effect on our body.

So if you listen to episode number six, titled move more, eat less about calories in versus calories out. In that episode, I talked about something called thermic effect of food and thermic effect of food is the amount of energy that our body uses in processing the food that we eat through simple digestion and breaking the food down. Now, in that episode, I mentioned that thermic effect of food for carbohydrates can vary greatly anywhere from 20% of the food to 7%. And this is where the processed carbs come in.

Because processed carbs tend to have a lower thermic effect of food than the whole food equivalence. Things like whole beans and lentils will have a greater thermic effect of food than something like a cookie, for example. Okay, and that's where processed carbs come in. And that's also the demonization that we have that all carbs are bad, because some carbs tend to increase our blood sugar and therefore cause our body to have a hormonal response to that and negative hormonal response to that, then we've demonized all carbs. Okay, so we can't do that anymore.

We need to separate out how different foods make us feel and really make that determination for yourself. Is your body, a body that does okay with flour, maybe it does, or maybe it doesn't, you get to figure that out for yourself.

And so let's talk a little bit about how carbs have changed evolutionarily. So if you think about grains in their raw state, they look and our body reacts to them very different than

in their ground state. So take for example, a piece of rice. I think that we all know what rice looks like and I'm using rice as an example here because not all of us know what a grain of wheat looks like but I'm gonna come back to that in just a little bit.

So in thinking about rice, we have two different versions that we can basically find in the store, we have white rice, and we have brown rice, brown rice is in the more natural form, the form that comes out of the ground. Whereas white rice has been minimally processed without getting too in the weeds about what happens when we look at a grain of brown rice.

And this is actually the anatomy of all types of grain, is there are three different parts, there's what's called the endosperm. And the endosperm is the middle of the grain. So with rice, generally, when we're looking at the grain of white rice, we're looking at what's called the endosperm. There's a an outer covering of the grain. And that's what we call the bran. And then there's also another little piece in the grain, and it's called the germ.

And when we think about the anatomy of a piece of grain, it becomes glaringly obvious that corn is actually a grain instead of a vegetable, because when you think about the outer covering of a kernel of corn, you have the bran, the middle part, the soft, lush part of corn is actually the endosperm. And then that little piece that actually gets caught in your teeth, is what's considered the germ.

And so when we think about wheat, we know wheat bran, we know wheat and we know wheat germ, those are just food manufacturers taking the grain and dividing it up into those three different areas.

When we're looking at brown rice, we see the grain of rice with the brand still on it, the brand is where most of the fiber is, as well as a fair amount of vitamins as well, in order to get white rice, what they have done is they've removed the brand from the rice kernel, and then bleached the rice in order to get it to be white rice.

So the fiber in the original piece of rice actually slows down a little bit of the absorption of the starch into our system, and therefore slows down the rise of blood sugar that we have in our bodies after we eat the rice.

Now flour is the exact same thing. If you look at a grain of rice, and you look at a grain of wheat, they actually look very, very similar. But what we've done with flour, then is we've not only removed the outer bran from it, but then we've also ground this grain down into a fine powder. And this is actually really super important because evolutionarily, when we ate the rice in its grain form, what happened is when we ate the rice, or the wheat that gave our body energy, and the brain knows that energy is good, right. And so when we eat the rice, or the wheat or any kind of carbohydrate, our brain gets a little bit of a dopamine response. It feels good, we enjoy it.

But what happens is, eventually we got more and more refined. And so we took that grain of wheat, and we ground it down into flour, then when we eat whatever we make with the flour, it's a concentrated form of carbohydrate. And so then we get an increased dopamine response.

Same thing with fruit. When we eat fruit when we eat strawberries, or apples or pineapple. Those things are really tasty, right? They're sweet, they're delicious. But if we take that fruit then and we concentrate it down into sugar, then we get a larger dopamine response. This is why carbs are so and I'm gonna use the term addicting in a very loose term here. So carbs tastes really good. And we like them. So of course we want to eat them.

So the moral of the story here is, the more close to nature, the food that we eat is going to be the more vitamins and minerals and fiber that food is going to have. And so therefore it's going to be better for us. So carbs can totally fit into a healthy diet. And so that's the next section here.

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So I want to talk about how carbs can fit into a healthy diet for you, you do not have to give them up. One thing that's really super important to recognize is that as we age and women over the age of 45, I'm talking to you that when we get older, our hormonal profile changes, we become more sensitive to insulin and we become more reactive to stress

What that means is when we eat carbohydrates when we eat starches, okay? What happens is our blood sugar rises in response to our blood sugar rising, our body releases what's called insulin, which is a hormone. And that insulin goes into our blood, it picks up all of the glucose molecules, and it stores it in our muscles to be used as energy.

Now, whatever it isn't able to store in our muscles then gets shuttled into our liver, and then whatever is left over gets shuttled into fat. So the key to weight loss is actually to keep our insulin levels as stable as possible. Because when we take in a large influx of carbohydrates, what happens is our blood glucose skyrockets, our body releases a ton of insulin in order to stabilize our blood sugar. And then what happens is, our blood sugar plummets, and when our blood sugar plummets, then we want to eat again. And when we eat again, then the whole cycle starts over again, that our blood glucose rises, our body releases insulin, and then we store the blood glucose as body fat again, and we don't want to do that.

And so what we want to do instead is we want to keep our blood glucose pretty much stable, which then in turn keeps our insulin stable, because when our blood sugar is stable, then we don't get really large fits of being hungry, the more stable our insulin is, then we don't get as hungry as often.

So one of the things that we want to do is we want to slow our body's absorption of carbohydrates. How we do that is we do it with eating protein. When we eat protein with our carbohydrates, what happens is the body doesn't digest the carbohydrates as quickly. And so it evens out the highs and lows of our blood glucose. And so therefore,

we don't get these huge spikes, and then drops where we need to eat because our blood sugar is low.

Now, one of the best times to eat carbohydrates is immediately after a workout. Because immediately after a workout, your body has used that glycogen up in that's been stored in the muscles. For your exercise, your body is really receptive to having that glucose, fill your muscles again, that's actually a really good time to eat fruit piece of toast or anything that's higher in carbohydrates or starch.

Now, knowing that the next question would be, when do I not want to eat carbohydrates? Well, so first of all, you generally don't want to eat carbohydrates by themselves, you don't want to eat starches by themselves, because as I said before, what will happen is, your body will digest all of that starch, your blood sugar will rise, and then your body will release insulin to put that into your muscles, and then shuttle whatever is left over into fat. So having a huge spaghetti dinner, without any protein in it really is not a fantastic idea if you want to lose weight.

Okay, I generally caution my clients from eating a ton of starch before they go to bed as well, because sometimes having too much starch at night can cause us to have hot flashes or night sweats or disrupted sleep. by limiting the amount of starch that we have in the evening, we might be able to have better sleep, I prefer that my starch consumption closely mimics my activity. And what I mean by that is when I'm more active, that's when I eat more carbohydrates. When I'm less active later in the day, that's when I slowly taper them.

Now the one time that I really caution my clients from eating starch is when they're drinking alcohol. And here's why. For women, alcohol is actually a poison. Well, it's a poison for all of us. But men actually have an enzyme that allows them to break down the alcohol where women do not. So if you were to take a 150 pound man and a 150 pound woman and give them the same amount of alcohol, the 150 pound man would

not be as intoxicated as the woman and this is important because the body cannot store alcohol as fat or energy. And so any foods that we take in with the alcohol, our body will immediately shuttle that into fat while it burns the calories. The energy That the alcohol includes.

And so the question becomes, should I go no starch? Or should I go no carb? Or can I have carbs? And the answer to that is, it's completely up to you and your body, everyone's body is totally different. How much starch your body can tolerate is unique to you, what I help my clients do is find what I call the starch tipping point. Now, this is the amount of starch that they can have in their diet, so that they don't gain weight, but not so much so that they feel spacey, or lethargic or that they don't feel good because everyone's body is a little bit different in terms of how much starch it needs. And this is one of the things that we get to figure out when designing the proper diet for you and your body is how much starch do you need? And then noticing how too much starch affects you afterwards?

So do you feel like you have like a carb hangover, so just be aware that everyone's tolerance of starch is completely different? And you just get to figure out what that is.

I hope that this has been really interesting to you. I can talk about this stuff all the time. And so if you have any questions, I would love to hear from you. I'm going to be doing a Q&A episode where I answer your questions. So if you have any about this, now is a great time to submit them. And the way that you can reach out to me and my team is by emailing me at hello at Elizabeth Sherman com or you can reach me on Instagram at E Sherman 68 or through Facebook at total health by Eliz.

Now, that's all I have for you today. I really enjoyed this. So I hope you have to and I will talk to you all next week. Bye bye.

Hey, thanks for listening.

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If you're done with dieting and would like to work with me as your coach, I'd like to invite you to reach out to myself and my team to ask about programs and pricing. Go to elizabethsherman.com/contact to get started today. I can't wait to hear from you.

See you next week.