



Food Facts

Glycaemic Index - is it just hype?

Introduction

Flick through a newspaper and you'll see the latest trend in slimming diets; "eat more, lose weight", "cut out carbs", or more recently, "GI-eating".



How do you know what's best? And does Glycaemic Index (GI) have a scientific basis?

We review some of the issues here.

The Glycaemic Index

The Glycaemic Index (GI) is simply a ranking of carbohydrate foods based on the rate at which they raise blood glucose levels. Each food is given a number or value:

- Foods that break down quickly will raise blood glucose quickly, and are given high GI values.
- Foods that break down slowly will raise blood glucose slowly, and are given low GI values.

Examples of foods with high and low GI values are shown in Table 1.





GI and weight loss

There is good scientific evidence that GI influences blood glucose levels. Slow, steady rises and falls in glucose may in addition help you feel full for longer.



GI can play a role in weight management by helping to control appetite and insulin levels. But it is not a "magic bullet" for weight loss.

Here are the facts:

- For GI to be effective in a slimming plan, it must be part of a calorie-controlled diet. 
- Most low GI foods (e.g. wholegrains, pasta, fruit, beans and lentils, and vegetables) are generally inherently healthy. Basing a diet plan on low GI foods of this kind can help you keep to healthy eating guidelines. 
- Foods with a high GI are not necessarily "unhealthy" foods. Compare watermelon (a high GI food) with chocolate pud (a low GI food). 
- The way a food is cooked or processed can affect the GI.
- When you mix foods together, the GI changes. So, a high GI food (like a jacket potato) when mixed with a low GI food (like baked beans) becomes a medium GI meal. It makes good nutritional sense to add a salad or vegetables to meals - this also helps to lower the overall GI. 
- Carbohydrate-free foods like meat and cheese are considered to have a zero GI. However, you should choose the leaner cuts of meat and lower fat dairy foods for a healthy diet.

NB: GI is not supposed to be used in isolation.

So, how can we use GI?


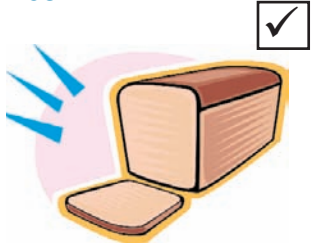


- The greatest research is in the area of diabetes. The European Association for the Study of Diabetes, the Canadian Diabetes Association and the Australian Dietetic Association recommend high fibre, low GI foods as a means of improving blood glucose and weight control.
- GI can be of benefit in weight management when combined with a reduced calorie intake and regular physical activity.
- Some low GI foods, such as those high in soluble fibre (e.g. beans and lentils) can help reduce blood cholesterol as part of a heart-healthy diet.

- Low GI foods, such as pasta, are great for carbohydrate loading before a sports event and high GI foods, like a glucose drink, provide fast release carbohydrate, quickly replacing glucose in the blood stream after an event.
- A diet based mainly on low GI foods may improve insulin sensitivity. (Insulin is the hormone which helps control blood glucose).

- A low GI diet, along with lifestyle changes, may also benefit those with Metabolic Syndrome X (a condition characterised by reduced insulin sensitivity, obesity, high blood pressure and abnormal blood fats).

Azmina Govindji RD

Table 1

<p>✓</p> <p>Healthy Low GI Foods</p> <p>Pasta (choose tomato-based sauces)</p> <p>Grainy breads (e.g. soya and linseed, granary)</p> <p>Bran-based breakfast cereals</p> <p>Porridge and reduced sugar muesli</p> <p>Sweet potatoes and new boiled potatoes in their skins</p> <p>Nuts (limit to a small handful - 1 oz - a day)</p> <p>Fruits</p> <p>Vegetables (raw or lightly cooked)</p> <p>Salad (choose low-fat dressings)</p> <p>Basmati rice</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> </div>	<p>✗</p> <p>High GI Foods to Reduce</p> <p>Pies</p> <p>Sweet pastries</p> <p>Sugar-rich drinks</p> <p>Doughnuts</p> <p>Croissants</p> <p>Shortbread</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> </div>
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