

Mental health and wellbeing

Nutrition Support Action Plan (NSAP) for case managers/key workers - glycemic index

What is the glycemic index?

Carbohydrates are the body's preferred fuel source. They get digested and converted into glucose, which is absorbed into the bloodstream and causes an effect on blood glucose levels (BGLs). Examples of carbohydrate-containing foods include bread, cereal, rice, pasta, starchy vegetables, dairy products and fruits. The glycemic index (GI) is a scale that ranks carbohydrate-containing foods based on their effect on BGLs over a period of time. Low GI carbohydrates have better health benefits.

Carbohydrate-containing foods are compared with glucose, which is given a GI score of 100. Carbohydrates that break down quickly during digestion have the highest GI (more than 70). The blood glucose response is **fast** and **high**. Carbohydrates that break down slowly release glucose gradually into the bloodstream. They have a low GI (less than 55). The blood glucose response is **slower** and **smaller**.

How much you eat is also important

The amount of carbohydrate-containing food eaten will also affect BGLs. For example, pasta has a low GI, but if you eat a very large serve, there is still a large amount of carbohydrate to be digested. This results in a large amount of glucose being absorbed into the blood stream, raising levels higher than they should be.

Low GI (55 or less): legumes (including baked beans), lentils, fruit, milk (including soy), yoghurt, pasta, grainy bread and porridge

Medium GI (56 – 69): basmati rice and long grain rice, wholemeal bread, orange sweet potato

High GI (70 or more): white potatoes, white bread and other rices.

When can you use GI foods?

A balanced diet is still the most important guide to follow for healthy eating. Using the GI is good for helping 'fine tune' blood glucose levels, so a low GI diet is often recommended to people with diabetes.

However, a low GI diet can be followed by anyone, particularly those wanting to lose weight. The slow blood glucose response may help people feel fuller for longer after meals. This may result in less snacking between meals. Including low GI foods at meals can also result in better concentration and cognitive function.

Tips for healthy eating the GI way:

- Eat moderate-sized meals regularly (and mid-meals, if hungry)
- Include a low GI food at each meal
- Use breakfast cereals based on oats, barley or bran
- Use grainy or soy-based breads
- Enjoy all types of fruit and vegetables
- Try sweet potato instead of white potato
- Include low fat dairy foods in meals and snacks.

Actions for case manager/key worker

1. Does your consumer follow a healthy diet? Check with '*NSAP Assessing your consumer's diet*'.
2. Does your consumer eat low glycemic index carbohydrates at each meal?
3. Does your consumer do enough physical activity? Half an hour most days can be done in blocks of 10 or 15 minutes.

Need more information?

www.glycemicindex.com or search

'Diabetes Australia' in your State.

www.health.qld.gov.au/multicultural/public/diabetes.asp