

The Heads Up on the Glycemic Index

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Q: I hear so much about good carbs/bad carbs and the glycemic index. What exactly is the glycemic index and how do I use it?

A: Ah yes the famous glycemic index. It has become a hot and important topic in the health and fitness industry, up there with: core, omega-3's, balance and many more! As with most buzz words, the vast majority of people are unaware of their meaning.

The glycemic index is a tool that measures how fast our body breaks down a particular carbohydrate (e.g. rice or broccoli) and converts it into sugar, and how much it affects our blood sugar levels. The measure is based on a scale of 0-100. Carbs that quickly turn into sugar will spike our blood sugar levels, and will consequently be closer to 100. Conversely, carbs that convert more slowly into sugar will have a less dramatic affect on our blood glucose and will rank closer to 0 on the chart.

- GI of 70 or more is High
- GI of 56-69 is Medium
- GI of 55 or less is Low.

The glycemic index has more recently gained recognition partially due to some popular diets on the market, which utilize this tool. ***In general, when one wants to lose body fat we need to keep our blood sugar levels stable and therefore choose carbs that are low glycemic (under 55).*** What is less talked about but equally important is the glycemic load.

The glycemic load is another way of measuring the impact that carbs have on our blood sugar. The GL, expressed as a percentage, not only takes into account a carbs GI, but also the amount of carbohydrate content per serving of the particular food. This gives us a more complete perspective of how a carb will affect blood glucose than the glycemic index alone. For example, the carrot has high GI rating of 71, but a low GL of 3.8. This is because per serving carrots do not have a lot of sugar or carb in them.

- GL of 20 or more is High
- GL of 11 to 19 is Medium
- GL of 10 or less is Low

So, how can we use these charts? I preach to my clients about staying away from refined carbohydrates (white bread), eating whole grains (bulgur), and increasing their fiber intake (lentils). Guess what all these things have in common?.....They all are food choices based on low GI and low GL ratings!

(ADD THE CHART IN HERE PLEASE USING THE BELOW TITLE ABOVE IT)

GLYCEMIC INDEX & GLYCEMIC LOAD CHART

Fit-Tip

The ultimate predicament occurs: You're at your friend's birthday dinner and they are serving cake for dessert. You can't say no because, well it's her birthday (or maybe b/c you have no will power ☺!) Here is an emergency trick to minimize the damage to your diet and the hard work you put into the gym that day. Before chowing down on the cake, eat a low glycemic fruit, like an apple. The pulp and fiber in the fruit will act like a filter and will help slow down the absorption of the sugar from the cake into your blood stream.

Fit-Recipe

Low Glycemic Shepherd's Pie (Courtesy of *Santemobile*)

Substituting Sweet potatoes for starchy white potatoes, asparagus for sweet peas, and adding turnips to the mix makes this recipe a great LOW GI version of an old classic. Substitute ground turkey for beef, and now it is leaner and meaner than ever!

4-5 sweet potatoes (16 ounces), peeled and chopped

2-3 small turnips (8 ounces), peeled and chopped

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 large onion, chopped

2 large garlic cloves, minced

1½ pounds ground turkey

1 can (15 ounces) tomato puree

½ cup chicken broth

1½ teaspoons dried thyme or oregano

1 bay leaf

Fresh flat leaf parsley - chopped 3 tablespoons

½ teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon ground black pepper

1/3 cup skimmed milk

¼ cup (1 ounce) grated Pecorino Romano cheese (optional)

10 - 12 asparagus spears

1. Fill a large pot with salted water. Add the potatoes and turnips and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium-low, cover, and cook until tender, 15 to 20 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, heat the oil in a large, oven-safe heavy skillet over medium heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until translucent and slightly browned, 5 to 6 minutes. Add the garlic and turkey, and cook, stirring to crumble, just until the turkey is no longer pink, 5 to 7 minutes.
3. Stir in the tomato puree, broth, thyme, bay leaf, salt, and 1/4 teaspoon of the pepper. Reduce the heat to low, and cook, stirring occasionally, until very thick, 25 to 30 minutes. Keep warm.
4. In a small saucepan, combine the milk and fresh parsley and pinch of salt. Heat over low heat. Drain the potato-turnip mixture and return it to the pot. Mash, gradually adding the milk mixture, until smooth and fluffy. Season with the remaining 1/4 teaspoon pepper.
5. In boiling water, blanch asparagus for approx 2 minutes. Remove from water and place in ice-cold water to stop cooking process.
6. Discard the bay leaf from the turkey mixture. Place asparagus on top of the turkey mixture. Spread the mashed potatoes over the meat to within 1" of the skillet sides. Sprinkle with the cheese (if using) and broil 4" from the heat source until lightly browned, 2 to 3 minutes, before serving.

Makes 6 Servings

Cooking Time: 21 minutes