

DEAR DIETITIAN

GO WITH THE GRAIN



Photo Credit : Socrates

Dear Dietitian,

Q: I love drinking barley water to reduce "heatiness". However, recently I have been told by my friends to stop doing so as barley water also contains sugar. Is it true?

A: Barley is a grain that has a rich source of both soluble and insoluble fibre. The beta glucan soluble fibre found in barley has been shown to lower total and LDL cholesterol. It is also beneficial in maintaining blood sugar levels. The insoluble fibre in barley also aids in preventing constipation. Beta glucan fibre are also present in other food, such as oats and whole grain cereals.

Your friend is not wrong. Drinking one glass of barley water alone will give you about 6g of carbohydrate mainly in the form of simple sugars. However, the barley grains also contain carbohydrate, but mainly in the form of starch. When you drink the barley water with the barley grains, the fibre in the grains ensure that the starch cause a blood sugar rise in a more controlled manner. So, if you want to get the full benefit of the fibre, you need to include the grains in your barley drink.

You may still continue with your favourite drink, but bear in mind the following:

- Make your own barley water using artificial sweeteners, e.g. Equal or Sweetico, instead of rock sugar.
- Remember to take the barley grains along with the water for the added benefit of the fibre.
- Have your barley water and barley grains as a mid-meal snack separately from your main meals, especially if you already had a substantial portion of carbohydrate at your main meal.
- (Please get advice from a dietitian about the amount of carbohydrate suitable for you at each meal if you have diabetes).

IS BUTTER BETTER?



Dear Dietitian,

Q: I am somewhat confused. Some people tell me I should eat butter instead of margarine as margarine contains trans fat. But I have always thought butter is high in saturated fat, which increases bad cholesterol (LDL).

A: There are mainly four forms of fat in our diet – saturated, monounsaturated, polyunsaturated and trans fat. Only saturated and trans fat have negative effects on our blood cholesterol level.

Saturated fat is found in high amount in food like fatty meat, butter, coconut, palm oil and most deep-fried stuff. Saturated fat increases the LDL or "bad" cholesterol in our body

Trans fat is formed as a by-product in a process called hydrogenation during the manufacture of semi-solid fats such as hydrogenated oils, margarine and shortening. Some consider trans fat more dangerous as it increases LDL as well as lowers the HDL or "good" cholesterol in our body. Trans fat should be <1% of our daily intake. Based on a 2000kcal diet, you should have <2g trans fat a day.

Butter is not healthier than margarine because it contains higher amounts of saturated fat and cholesterol. Hard margarine though, may contain more trans fat than butter. The Health Promotion Board of Singapore is working with local manufacturers to reduce the trans fat content of their products. Look out for soft margarine with the Healthier Choice symbol, as it contains none or less than 0.05g trans fat per serving. Health-wise, choose soft margarine, which is lower in cholesterol, saturated and trans fat per serving compared to butter.

However, do not forget one teaspoon of margarine or butter will still provide you with about the same amount of calories, so just put a thin layer if you are trying to lose weight.

This issue's resident dietitian is Ms Ong Fang Yi, dietitian, National University Hospital. Email your questions addressed to the Editor, Diabetes Singapore, Diabetic Society of Singapore. Fax 6553 1801