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Don't hate potatoes



If potatoes are a vegetable and vegetables are supposed to be healthy, why are many sources saying potatoes aren't good for us?

Potatoes *are* good for us. They are a rich source of potassium as well as vitamin C and many B vitamins. They are also a good source of fibre and provide vital food energy.

However, because this vegetable offers lots of 'calories,' mainly as carbohydrates, we are wise to consider potatoes more a higher carb or a starchy carb choice, rather than a 'vegetable' choice. So, think of potatoes as an alternative to other starchy root vegetables, or breads, rice, or other grains. Your 'vegetable' choices are considered the lower-calorie and lower-carb vegetables.

Much of the potatoes' lousy reputation stems from the current belief that 'carbs' are bad for us. But whole, unprocessed complex carbs offer tons of nutrients, along with fibre, and provide a slowly released energy source, keeping our blood sugar levels stable. It is the highly changed or processed carbs that lack nutrients and cause a blood sugar surge because they are so quickly absorbed. Therefore, whole, unchanged carbs aren't the problem: It's the highly processed carbs we need less of.

Some avoid potatoes because of their high glycemic index (a rating of how quickly a food is absorbed compared to table sugar). However, the glycemic index (GI) can change: Potatoes have a lower (GI) when eaten with a full meal or with the skin left on. In any case, recent research finds the [glycemic index rating of foods is inaccurate](#). Certain foods may raise blood sugar levels in some individuals but not in others. Many healthy foods have high GI ratings (like carrots). To avoid these nutritious foods because of their (questionable) rate of absorption is unwise.

Potatoes also have a bad reputation because it is a “starchy” vegetable. The word “starch” is just as misunderstood and feared as “carbohydrate.” Starch is a type of carbohydrate (as are sugars and fibre) that occurs within all whole plant foods. Despite what current popular diets tell you, any type of carbohydrate (plant food) is vital for good health. However, it is the highly processed versions of carbs or starch that can negatively affect our good health – such as the pure starch *extracted* from a whole food and added to other foods (like potato starch or corn starch, etc.). When *anything* is extracted from a whole food, it loses many nutrients, and the synchronicity of those nutrients working together within the whole food. The fibre is lost too. A good example is the ubiquitous “table sugar” that we add to everything: It is extracted from sugar cane, sugar beets, or corn. It’s far better to eat sugar cane, beets, and corn in their whole form. This allows all the sugars, starches and fibre within the food to work together as a team – the way nature designed them to.

A healthy serving of any complex carb/starch, for each person, is about the size of their clenched fist (and there is way more than that in a typical order of French fries!). Have two to three servings daily (preferably spread throughout the day). Overeating any single food will risk limiting the wide variety of nutrients we need for good health. And if we overdo the higher calorie, high carb/starch vegetables like potatoes, we risk gaining weight. No doubt, we are a “potato” eating society: Baked, fried, or boiled, potatoes are the most common carbohydrate (or starchy root vegetable) on restaurant menus.

Vary your choices if you think you eat too many potatoes. Enjoy other healthy complex carbohydrates: try sweet potato, jicama or turnip, cassava, taro, or the many varieties of winter squash. And there are also many varieties of potato: purple, yellow, russet, etc. Change them up often. Scrub the skin well and eat that too for more fibre (and other nutrients we haven’t identified yet). Bake, roast, boil, or broil, but avoid deep frying if you’d like to eat low-fat (oven roast your “fries” instead).

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