

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Nutrition

Q. What does the U.S. Potato Board suggest as a healthy diet?

A. The U.S. Potato Board suggests eating a varied eating plan that is balanced in nutrients and moderate in calories. The majority of scientific research supports a plan such as that consisting of mostly complex carbohydrate foods such as potatoes, moderate amounts of protein, and low amounts of fat.

The Produce for Better Health Foundation says the cornerstones for a healthy life include eating low-fat meals, 5 to 9 servings of colorful fruits and vegetables every day, along with performing regular physical activity. A combination of physical activity and proper food intake can help with attaining and maintaining a healthy weight.

Q. Are potatoes nutritious?

A. YES! Potatoes are naturally fat-free and cholesterol-free. Potatoes eaten with the skin are a rich source of vitamin C and potassium, and a good source of fiber. Potatoes contain nutrients known to contribute to heart health. In fact, a medium-sized potato with the skin contains 21 percent of the daily value of potassium. Foods that are good sources of potassium and low in sodium, such as potatoes, may reduce the risk of high blood pressure and stroke. There are many healthy ways to prepare and eat potatoes.

Q. What is carbohydrate and why do we need it?

A. Carbohydrate (CHO) is the body's main energy source. CHO comes in the form of starches and sugars, as well as fiber, which is not digestible and therefore not considered an energy source. There are two types of carbohydrate: complex (whole grains, rice, fruits and vegetables) and simple CHO (sugars/nutritive sweeteners and sweets). Milk, fruits and vegetables also contain some natural simple sugars. A medium potato with the skin has 26 g carbohydrate (9 percent daily value) and 3 grams fiber (12 percent daily value) per serving. CHO typically comprises between 55 to 60 percent of total daily calories (roughly 275-300 grams CHO per day based on 2,000 calorie daily intake).

Q. Are potatoes fattening?

A. NO! The potato contains zero fat and cholesterol and a 5.3-ounce potato has only 100 calories. Cutting down calories while revving up exercise is what works for weight control. Prevailing science shows that calories still count regardless of what foods they come from. Vegetables are known sources of many nutrients and dietary fiber, so limiting vegetables like potatoes is not a wise choice to achieve a healthy weight. A medium-sized potato is rich in vitamin C and potassium and a good source of fiber.

Q. What about potatoes and the glycemic index?

A. The glycemic index (GI) is a system that assigns a number to foods, particularly carbohydrate foods, based on their ability to increase blood glucose. Research on GI is preliminary and variable, and the practicality of the GI of individual foods in meal planning is controversial. Many factors affect the glycemic index, such as what other foods are eaten at the same time. In the case of potatoes, for example,

common toppings such as cheese, broccoli, butter, salsa or vinegar may lower the combined GI. Rarely does a person eat one potato by itself, yet that is how glycemic index is measured. After an extensive review of scientific research, the American Diabetes Association concluded that for people with diabetes, the total amount of carbohydrate in meals and snacks, rather than the type, determines the blood glucose (glycemic) response.

Q. Should we choose foods based on their glycemic index?

A. No. Many health organizations, including the American Diabetes Association, do not recommend the selection of foods based on glycemic index alone. Research concerning the glycemic index is preliminary and questionable. Consuming carbohydrates along with protein or fat at a meal favorably alters or blunts the body's glycemic response, yet there is limited research in this area. It is the total amount of carbohydrate rather than the type that determines the body's glycemic response.

Q. Is it safe to eat the potato skin?

A. Absolutely! In fact, we recommend it. The skin of the potato contains fiber and many nutrients. Wash the potato thoroughly, cut away green discoloration and/or sprouts and enjoy your potato with the skin on.

Q. Is it safe to eat raw potatoes?

A. Yes, as long as they are washed and scrubbed clean. Some consider raw potatoes a treat.

Preparation and Storage

Q. Why does the potato selection vary at grocery stores throughout the year?

A. The majority of the potatoes in the United States are harvested between August and October and are then shipped from storage through the spring. Inspect your potatoes before purchasing. Choose firm, smooth potatoes and avoid those with wrinkled or wilted skins or green patches. Make sure your produce manager knows about any defects.

Q. Can leftover potatoes be frozen?

A. We don't recommend it. While cooked potatoes can be frozen, they tend to become watery upon reheating. The potato is 80 percent water; and when frozen, this water separates from the starch and nutrients causing the reheated potato dish to be watery.

Food and Agriculture

Q. What are new potatoes?

A. They are actually freshly dug potatoes that have not reached their maturity. True new potatoes are sold from late winter or early spring through midsummer.

Q. What part of the potato plant is a "tuber"?

A. Tuber refers to the thickened underground stem of a potato plant, which is the portion the potato we eat.

Q. How does a potato grow?

A. A potato plant is a vine that grows above ground with tubers that grow from the roots under ground.

Q. Why is there sometimes green coloring on the potato skin?

A. The green on the skin of a potato is a natural reaction to the potato being exposed to too much light. It has a bitter taste and should not be eaten. Just cut away the green portions of the potato skin before cooking and eating.

Q. Why do potatoes grow sprouts?

A. Sprouts are a sign that the potato is trying to grow. Cut the sprouts away before cooking or eating the potato. Reduce sprouting by storing potatoes in a cool, dry, dark location that is well ventilated, but not in the refrigerator.