

Pass the potatoes, please

Registered dietician Ashley Koff, founder of [Ashley Koff Approved](#), gives permission to pass the potatoes, instead of passing on the potatoes

Often overlooked on the list of “healthy” foods, potatoes actually have great nutritional benefits and can be prepared in a variety of healthy ways. So don’t hesitate to say, “Pass the potatoes, please.”

Potatoes come in different sizes and shapes, from the hearty potato commonly known as the “baking potato” to red skinned and fingerlings. They are also distinguished by age, “mature” versus “new,” and are often named for their harvest location.

So what’s a potato got to offer? For starters, potatoes have fiber and potassium. Fiber and potassium play critical roles in heart health by reducing bad cholesterol and helping to support healthy blood pressure levels. Potassium works to help the body stay hydrated by bringing water into cells contradicting the effects of sodium, which sucks water out. This helps you stay hydrated longer. Potatoes also have vitamins B6 and C, and minerals copper and manganese. Vitamin B6 is important because it helps to create electrical connections in the brain and breaks down glycogen, or stored sugar in our muscles to generate energy.

What’s more, recent research highlights that the antioxidants and other phytonutrients (plant-based nutrients) in potatoes help the body to scavenge and remove unwanted free radicals.

Packed with nutrients and naturally low in calories, potatoes satisfy my criteria for “nutritious meets delicious.” Yes, potatoes are a carbohydrate source, but carbs are necessary for generating optimal energy to fuel our brains and bodies. It’s only when we eat too much at one time, or pile on toppings, that the health benefits decrease and the risks of poor health and the related risks of fat and weight gain increase.

So, how can you reap the health benefits of a potato without restricting yourself to the agreeably less inspiring half a boiled or plain baked potato? First, keep the skins on – especially for your potato chips. And bake them – which gives your mouth a satisfying crunch, preserves the great flavor we love and retains the beneficial nutrients in potatoes without making your waistline or heart health suffer.

*According to the profile on potatoes in World’s Healthiest Foods (www.whfoods.com), “A new analytical method developed by Agricultural Research Service plant geneticist Roy Navarre has identified 60 different kinds of phytochemicals and vitamins in the skins and flesh of 100 wild and commercially grown potatoes. Analysis of Red and Norkotah potatoes revealed that these spuds’ phenolic content rivals that of broccoli, spinach and Brussels sprouts, and includes flavonoids with protective activity against cardiovascular disease, respiratory problems and certain cancers. Navarre’s team also identified potatoes with high levels of vitamin C, folic acid, quercetin and kukoamines. These last compounds, which have blood pressure lowering potential, have only been found in one other plant, Lycium chinense (a.k.a., wolfberry/gogi berry). How much kukoamine is needed for a blood pressure lowering effect in humans must be assessed before it can be determined whether an average portion of potatoes delivers enough to impact cardiovascular health.”