

Are Potatoes Good for You?

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you're making food and then you realize that your meal could be significantly improved with a few good taters? Oh, potatoes! You can boil 'em, mash 'em, stick 'em in a stew, or you may opt for lovely big golden chips with a nice piece of fried fish. Who can say no to that? Are potatoes rare good ballast for an empty belly or will they make you stout, diminutive and simple-minded?

Are Potatoes Healthy?

Potatoes have become a **staple food** throughout the world, alongside corn, rice, wheat, soybean, and others. A staple food is the name given to a food that is eaten often enough and in sufficient quantities by a certain population to become its **main source of energy**, in addition to supplying a significant portion of other **essential nutrients**.

However, potatoes have (perhaps unjustly) gotten a bad rep over the years, with some people saying they are fattening and, since they're mostly starch, many countries don't count them towards the five recommended daily portions of fruits and vegetables. Nevertheless, most experts agree that **potatoes are healthier than pasta and other processed products**. They are grown on farms and not produced in factories. They contain **no additives or preservatives** and they contain a wide variety of essential nutrients, and **not just "carbs"**.

Nutrients in Potatoes

Raw potatoes are mostly composed of **water (79%)**, **carbohydrates (17%)** and **protein (2%)**. Raw potato accounts for approximately a quarter of the Recommended Daily Intake of **vitamins C and B6**. However, potatoes are not eaten raw, and many of the preparation methods significantly lower the levels of these vitamins. Even so, potatoes are still indispensable for their high levels of **potassium** (higher than bananas), **magnesium**, **fiber** and **antioxidants** including carotenoids, flavonoids and anthocyanins.

Potato Benefits

The antioxidants found in potatoes **boost the immune system**, **improve cardiovascular health** and **help protect against certain cancers**, while the high potassium levels **keep the blood pressure in check**. Research suggests that potatoes may have many additional health benefits, including:

- weight loss (when cooked and eaten chilled)
- lower risk of chronic disease
- stable blood sugar levels
- better digestion

- improved brain activity
- better endurance



Potato Toxicity

Potatoes contain several **toxic chemical compounds** (glycoalkaloids, the main being solanine), primarily concentrated in the sprouts, stems and leaves. The **tubers contain significantly lower levels of these toxins** than other parts of the potato plant, but the potato peel can still be quite toxic. The toxicity of the tuber flesh increases with age, physical damage and light exposure. **Don't eat old, wrinkly potatoes.**

Still, potato poisoning is a very rare occurrence, since the cultivars intended for human consumption are developed to contain **low levels of glycoalkaloids**. These levels, however, are not significantly affected by home processing methods (cooking, boiling, baking, and others). The temperature required to significantly degrade the toxic compounds exceeds 210 °C (410 °F), which means that eating raw potatoes to get out of school is hardly a foolproof method. Any discomfort caused by **raw potatoes** comes from their **indigestibility** (raw starches are hard to

digest) and the consequent **bloating, abdominal cramping and flatulence** as they ferment in the lower intestine.

Symptoms of potato poisoning include:

- nausea
- cramps
- diarrhea
- headaches

In severe cases:

- organ failure
- coma
- death

Green Potatoes

The green potato skin and, in some cases, green coloring under the skin, indicates that the tubers have been **exposed to light**. As a natural defense against being eaten, these tubers have significantly higher levels of solanine, which makes them **unsafe for human consumption**. Green potatoes should never be eaten. It doesn't matter if they're cooked, since, as previously mentioned, the **cooking does little to affect the high level of glycoalkaloids**. Additionally, if a potato has a distinctly **bitter taste**, it is **toxic** more likely than not.

Potato Recipes and Health



Although potatoes are essentially good for you, a lot of their **effects on health depend on how they're prepared**. Baked potatoes, for example, are among the healthier options, even though **baking significantly lowers their levels of vitamin C and vitamin B6**. You should **avoid** potatoes fried in large quantities of oil, like **hash browns** and **french fries**. **Potato salad** can also be very **fattening** when it is prepared with too much mayonnaise.

Potatoes are **healthier when you do not peel the skin** since it contains a large amount of fiber, vitamins and minerals. Nutritionists agree that boiled potatoes, steamed potatoes and baked potatoes are the best, but you also need to opt for **healthy toppings**, otherwise your cooking method won't make much of a difference.

The bottom line is, as long as you steer clear of the tricky green ones, whether you choose to eat potatoes or avoid them is entirely up to you. You can easily find a **healthy recipe** you like and make potatoes an integral part of your healthy diet. Otherwise, you can choose to get the same nutrients from other foods like brown rice or sweet potatoes and let the potato eaters keep their "nasty chips".