

Potatoes + Complex Carbs: Your Body's Energy Currency

If a “healthy food” is defined as having properties which benefit your health (seems fair, right?) then Ground Leaf has some good news for you: potatoes are indeed a healthy food.

Among the diet rhetoric of the past few decades has been a strong case against the potato, which followers of programs like the Atkins Diet say spikes blood sugar, is full of “empty calories”, and is high in starches and carbohydrates. According to the “low-carb craze,” these properties are all bad, because carbs make you fat, right?

Wrong.

This is yet another example of how our perceptions of food are so deeply affected by mainstream “pop-nutrition.” The potato is a staple vegetable that is high in vitamins and minerals, and has been relied upon to feed worldwide populations and cultures for thousands of years (1). Very recently, with the surge in North American obesity levels and the subsequent rise in trendy diets, the potato has been vilified as a contributing factor to the weight gain of the masses. But when you look at the facts, it’s not the potato itself that’s unhealthy; it’s the deep fried, genetically modified renditions smothered in butter, cheese, sour cream and bacon that are actually causing problems.

The Difference Between Complex and Simple Carbs

To properly understand this subject, it’s essential to explore the difference between complex and simple carbs, because putting them both in the same category is just as flawed as putting all fats into the “fat” category. Good fats - such as Omega 3, 6, and 9’s - are essential to your health and cellular function, while trans fats contribute to heart disease, chronic inflammation, and obesity (2). Let’s take a look at how the subtleties of starches can make a world of difference to your health and energy levels.

Complex Carbohydrates

Potatoes contain vitamins, minerals, and fiber, the key factors to consider when determining if a carb is “good” or “bad” (3). Complex carbohydrates, often referred to as dietary starch, take longer to be broken down, and supply lasting energy and a feeling of satisfaction. In addition to their highly absorbable minerals, potatoes are a rich source of B vitamins which are important for cell renewal, they contain resistant starch which feeds friendly gut bacteria, and...they’re technically a complete protein. (4) Bonus!

Simple Carbohydrates

Simple carbohydrates tend to be more refined, break down much faster, provide energy spikes, and can leave you feeling depleted and hungry a very short time after eating. Corn syrup, refined sugar, processed cereals, and white bread are all examples of simple carbohydrates. As you can see, these examples are clearly all devoid of nutrients, including vitamins, minerals, and fiber, thereby rendering them “bad” for your health and your energy levels. Please note that fruits are also simple carbohydrates; but, unlike refined foods, they have an abundance of fiber and nutrients, and are thus a wise food decision.

The Revolutionary Potato

While we are fortunate to have modern nutritional research at our fingertips, past civilizations have known about the benefits of the humble potato for an estimated 10,000 years (5). So versatile, tasty, and obviously sustaining of health, the potato is also said to have revolutionized agriculture, and has grown to be the fifth most important crop in the world (6).

Some are so keen on the health benefits of this gnarly little bud that they are claiming potatoes have completely transformed their health. A man in Australia is documenting his year of eating exclusively potatoes at SpudFit.com; he's said that this (doctor supported) dietary shift has not only helped him to lose weight, but has helped to cure his addiction to food. Take that, low-carb people!

The Sweet Potato

We can't have a discussion about the potato without a shout-out to its popular relative, the sweet potato. Mainstream nutrition commonly suggests that the sweet potato is more "nutrient dense" than the regular potato, but research indicates that this isn't necessarily true. Both regular and sweet potatoes offer the same amounts of fiber and calcium, and similar amounts of vitamin C. The sweet potato has over 400% more vitamin A than a regular potato, but a regular potato has more iron and potassium (7). The end result? Both are a rich source of nutrients, and for optimal variety, both deserve a place on your plate.

“Complex carbohydrates, found in plants, are major suppliers of energy and contribute to stomach and gut health.” - T. Colin Campbell, Ph.D. (8)

Potatoes are tasty, satisfying, adaptable, and packed with energy-producing nutrition. This 'superfood' - and complex whole food carbohydrates in general - are not just healthy but *vital* to an energetic life and a properly functioning system.

- 1) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_potato
- 2) <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3192664/>
- 3) <http://www.livestrong.com/article/368973-are-potatoes-good-carbs/>
- 4) http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/6-reasons-we-should-be-calling-potatoes-a-superfood_us_57be44b9e4b06384eb3e339c
- 5) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_potato
- 6) <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/how-the-potato-changed-the-world-108470605/?no-ist>
- 7) <http://www.medicaldaily.com/sweet-potato-vs-regular-potato-which-better-your-health-357898>
- 8) <http://www.redbookmag.com/body/healthy-eating/advice/a17044/low-carb-diets/>