

Hot Potato

When it comes to nutrition, this vegetable is no small fry

by **MADELEINE GREY**

What has fewer calories than a grapefruit, more potassium than a banana, half the protein of an egg, and is fat-free, cholesterol-free and low in sodium? Would you believe the humble potato?

And there's more. Spuds boast vitamin C, folate, fibre, good carbs and B vitamins.

Of course, potassium and fibre aren't top of mind for your little potato head when he's clamouring for more mashed or pleading for another helping of home fries. Our children seem to eat more of this nutritional powerhouse than any other vegetable. But here's the catch: Most of the spuds kids are chomping on come in the shape of french fries and chips.

According to Statistics Canada, our consumption of fresh potatoes is on the decline. In 2003, 47 percent of potatoes eaten were fresh, compared with 53 percent processed. Whether it's chips and fries, or mashed from a box, we're eating more quick and convenient potato products than plain old boiled, baked or roasted. And that's too bad, since eating a spud the old-fashioned way can be downright nutritious. But most people, it seems, are unaware of the potato's power: A recent study revealed only 10 percent of Canadians choose potatoes for their vitamins and minerals.

So to feel virtuous, we need to serve our young 'uns potatoes we've cooked from fresh, right? Not necessarily. That halo gets tarnished pretty fast depending on the amount of butter, sour cream, bacon bits or cheese we slather on top. McCain.ca makes a shrewd nutritional point when it compares an



Cheesy Potato Nests

Find me a kid who can resist these tasty parcels! Grate the Yukon Golds with their skins on for flavour and nutrition.

- 2** medium organic Yukon Gold potatoes
- 1 cup** (250 mL) grated cheese (cheddar, Monterey Jack or Gruyère)
- 3** green onions, minced
- 1 tbsp** (15 mL) olive oil
- ½ tsp** (2 mL) salt
- freshly ground pepper**

Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C).

Fill a large bowl halfway with water. Grate scrubbed potatoes, placing grated pieces into the water as you work. In a large sieve, drain potatoes, pressing to release as much water as possible. Lay out a clean tea towel; spread potatoes in a single layer, then roll up and squeeze out extra moisture.

In a large bowl, combine potatoes, cheese, green onions, olive oil, salt and pepper. Mix. On a parchment-paper-lined baking sheet, spoon out one-sixth of the mixture to create a nest. Repeat 5 times.

Bake on the middle rack for 35 to 40 minutes or until golden brown.

Makes 6 servings.

Our recipe tester, Jenny Koniuk, tests Nutrition using both imperial and metric measurements. However, proportions in the metric version may differ slightly from the original, causing small variations in the result.

85 g serving of Superfries Straight Cut fries to a medium baked potato with 1 tbsp regular margarine: The fries have half the calories and one-third the fat.

No wonder potatoes have an image problem! But the fact is, a pure, unadorned potato is nutritionally superior. “Think of the potato as a base to put healthy toppings on,” suggests Toronto dietitian Lois Ferguson. Serve top-your-own baked potatoes one night and let the kids choose from such toppings as toasted sesame or sunflower seeds, salsa, grated low-fat cheese, low-fat sour cream or yogurt, grated carrots, shredded lettuce or a kid’s best friend — ketchup.

SAVE YOUR VITAMINS

How else can you preserve your potato’s healthy punch? Be careful how you cook it. “Cooking methods do affect nutrition retention or losses,” says Toronto dietitian Sue Mah. “Generally, the B vitamins and vitamin C are more fragile, and losses will occur with light exposure, time and cooking.”

Keep nutrients in with these tips:

- Baking a potato in the skin means more folate, fibre and iron than if you were to peel and boil, mash or fry a potato. And don’t forget to eat the skin to reap the benefits. A baked potato in skin retains 80 percent of vitamin C, 85 to 95 percent of B vitamins and 100 percent of other nutrients including potassium, iron and vitamin A.
- The higher the heat, the faster the bake. As Mah says: “What nutrients you might spare by cooking at a lower temperature, you might lose by cooking potatoes longer.” Here are some baking guidelines:
400°F (200°C) for 40–50 minutes
350°F (180°C) for 55–65 minutes
320°F (160°C) for 80–90 minutes
- Or micro-bake: Microwave on high power for 8 minutes (turning halfway through), then bake at 450°F (230°C) for 20 minutes. Remember to puncture a potato with a fork or knife before cooking in the microwave to

Spud Nix?

Obviously a baked potato with skin (161 calories, 0 fat, 17 mg sodium, 4 g fibre) is a better option than even a really small bag (1 oz/28 g) of chips which (unbelievably) racks up fewer calories (155), but makes up with loads of fat (11 g) and sodium (148 mg), with just a tad of fibre (1 g).

prevent surprise starchy explosions.

- When boiling, protect nutrient loss by first bringing the water to a boil, then adding the potatoes to cook. Boiled whole potatoes with their skin will retain more nutrients than peeled, cut potatoes.
- Save potato-cooking water (it contains water-soluble vitamins). Add to stocks or use as liquid when mashing.
- A leftover boiled potato that is pan-fried contains 55 percent less vitamin C, 25 percent less folate and 15 percent less niacin than a baked potato in skin.

YOU SAY POTATO, I SAY RUSSET

There are more than 5,000 types of potatoes. You don’t need to know a

Frisia from a Kennebec, but you do need to know which kind of potato is right for baking versus boiling. Choose Russets or Yukon Golds for their fluffy, dry texture — perfect for baking or mashing. Choose round white or red potatoes for their waxy texture and ability to hold their shape when boiled, roasted or plopped into a homemade soup.

Any way you like ‘em, there’s a spud for you. ♥

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Into the Fryer

Some kids seem to consider fries a food group unto themselves. Even Toronto dietitian Sue Mah, mother of Ben, five, and Abbey, four, admits that french fries are her kids’ favourite way to eat potatoes. Mah warns parents, though, to watch out for trans fats. Many fast-food fries still have them, but kudos to New York Fries, Wendy’s and Swiss Chalet, who have removed or considerably reduced them. And it’s pretty easy in the supermarket to find trans-fat-free, low-fat frozen fries to bake in your oven, which means parents need not fight a kid’s fetish for fries. Here’s how things compare:

| FAST-FOOD FRIES | 1 serving | calories | fat | trans fats | sodium |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|----------|--------|------------|--------|
| New York Fries | 100 g | 280 | 14 g | 0 g | 70 mg |
| Wendy’s kids’ fries | 91 g | 280 | 14 g | 0.3 g | 270 mg |
| Swiss Chalet fries | 84 g | 235 | 12.5 g | 0.25 g | 23 mg |
| McDonald’s small fries | 70 g | 230 | 11 g | 1.5 g | 190 mg |
| Burger King kids’ fries | 74 g | 230 | 12 g | 3 g | 240 mg |
| SUPERMARKET FRIES | | | | | |
| McCain Premium Superfries Crinkle Cut | 85 g | 140 | 5 g | 0 g | 280 mg |
| McCain Smiles | 85 g | 190 | 9 g | 0.3 g | 260 mg |
| Cavendish Crinkle Cut | 85 g | 120 | 2.5 g | 0 g | 320 mg |
| Cavendish Flavour Crisp Spicy | 100 g | 160 | 8 g | 0 g | 410 mg |