

## The Spudtacular Tater

On National “Tater” Day, March 31, we get to celebrate one of the most versatile foods—the potato! This tubular vegetable can be prepared countless ways – fried, baked, boiled, mashed, hashbrowns, fries, tater tots, and added to almost any meal. Originally, sweet potatoes were called “taters,” but now the name refers to all types of potatoes. The most commonly eaten vegetable in the United States is the potato.

Potatoes are low maintenance and grow easily under the ground in many different climates. They have undoubtedly saved many people from hunger during hard times. It is believed that the Incas discovered potatoes as a food source around 2500 B.C., and potatoes were brought to North America in 1621. Many people depended on potatoes to solve food shortages, and their high nutritional values kept many people alive. Tragically, in 1845, a plant disease wiped out all of the potato crops in Europe, and many people starved.

Potatoes have gotten a bad reputation as not being nutritious. That is not true. However, the potato has health and nutrition benefits many people do not know about. It is all about how the potato is prepared. French fries and tater tots fried in oil are heavy in fat and calories, but a potato cooked alone is fat and cholesterol-free. If you healthily prepare a potato, it can be a satisfying food.

Potatoes have a high fiber content, which helps us feel full longer after eating and can help us lose weight. Fiber can help keep cholesterol and blood sugar at healthy levels, which can help prevent heart disease. Potatoes are also full of vitamins that can improve body function and antioxidants to prevent diseases.

The fiber found in potatoes is called “resistant starch.” Resistant starch has the health benefits of both soluble fiber and insoluble fiber that causes less gas than other fiber types. To increase the resistant starch levels in potatoes, cook them the day before eating and cool them in the refrigerator overnight. They may be reheated before eating. Resistant starch has properties like a prebiotic and is food for bacteria in the bowels to improve gut health. Potatoes also help support a potassium-rich diet, which can help decrease blood pressure, protect the heart, and reduce stroke risk. When a person does not consume enough potassium, their body retains extra sodium, which raises blood pressure. Baked potato skin is an excellent source of potassium and magnesium.

In order to keep your tater healthy, limit high-fat toppings such as butter, cheese, sour cream, and keep portion sizes small. Alternatively, use high protein, low-fat toppings such as chili to top your baked potato.

How the potato is cooked plays a big part in the nutritional value of potatoes. A large order of French fries has over four times as many calories and 23 more grams of fat than the potato from which it was made. Roasting, boiling, and baking are healthier options and make delicious side dishes and mouth-watering snacks.

Cooking potatoes is inexpensive and convenient. Potatoes are available in grocery stores year-round. Raw potato has a shelf life of about one week. There are countless varieties of potatoes to

choose from, but the most common types are red, yellow, russet, white, and fingerling potatoes. Be sure always to scrub and wash your potatoes thoroughly before cooking. It is best to leave the skins on the potatoes when cooking for fiber and nutrition.

Celebrate the day by eating some taters!

(Sources: [www.holidayscalendar.com](http://www.holidayscalendar.com); [nationaltoday.com](http://nationaltoday.com); [snaped.fns.usda.gov](http://snaped.fns.usda.gov); [www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com))