

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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One Potato, Two Potato

For many people, potatoes are a health no-no. I hear the concerns all the time - "They're too full of carbs, they're all white, they have nothing useful." If you're talking about strips of potatoes dipped in hot grease, then sprinkled with lots of salt and dipped again in lots of sugar (or *ketchup*, which is nutritionally about the same as tomato jam), then I'd agree. But even those French fries do have some nutritional value. But mostly, the problem with potatoes is all the other stuff we put on and in them.

Consider some of the nutrition. A medium potato, without all the extra oil or sour cream, cheese or ketchup, only has 120 calories. That potato is filling enough to keep you going for quite awhile, when a 120 calorie candy bar will wear off very quickly. (Can you even find a 120 calorie candy bar these days? Some of the ones I've looked at recently are more like 250 calories!)

Part of the reason a potato can be so filling is that in addition to the carbohydrates that we think about, potatoes have plenty of both water and fiber. Both fill up space for us, but don't give us any calories. There are only about 27 g of total carbs in a medium potato, and at least 2 of those are nondigestible fiber. And there is growing research that depending on how and when we cook the potato there may be more. For instance, potato starch that is cooked then allowed to cool is less digestible than the same starch that is freshly cooked. Whether that difference will be significant in our diets is not decided yet, but maybe one day we'll be able to say that potato salad is better than a freshly baked potato.

Potato fiber is spread throughout the potato too, it's not just in the skins. So if you don't like eating the skins, don't think you're losing out on all the fiber. You won't get as much, but there will still be fiber in your meal.

Another nutrient that most people would never expect to find in a potato is vitamin C. Yes, just like in oranges or green peppers, potatoes really do have vitamin C. A medium baked potato has almost half the vitamin C that you need for the day. For many of our young people, the fries they prefer at every meal are a significant source of their vitamin C intake! If you slice the potato and leave

the slices sitting while you prepare the rest of recipe or meal there will be less C. It's sensitive to air and light. So the less exposure to air or light a cut potato gets, the better it is for you.

Potatoes are also very good sources of potassium. If you've been reading this column for long, you probably all ready know that potassium is one of the important minerals for managing our blood pressure. And potatoes have a lot more of it than bananas do! Have a potato, help keep your pressure down.

Of course since they're plants, potatoes are both fat free and cholesterol free - until we fry them in grease or drown them in cheese sauce! But baked or boiled, the numbers are 0 for those two ingredients. And potatoes are naturally very close to sodium free as well. A whole medium potato has only 5 mg of sodium. When our daily dose is recommended to be 1500 mg, we could eat a lot of potatoes before we get that much! Try as many herbs or seasonings as you want, just skip the salt.

And that brings up one other good thing about potatoes. Because they don't have a strong flavor of their own, we can season them in hundreds of ways. There are potato curries, pancakes, cakes and cookies; quiches, omelets, stews and breads. People all over the world have adopted the potato as part of their own national cuisines. So go ahead, have a potato or two. Just watch what you put on it!

Here's a way to serve meat and potatoes along with other vegetables, in a cute way that even the kids should enjoy. It's also a good way to manage portion sizes.

#### Mini Potato and Beef Cups

1 pound lean ground beef or turkey	2 cups frozen mixed vegetables
1 14.5 oz-can stewed tomatoes, no salt	$\frac{3}{4}$ cup shredded low fat Cheddar cheese
3 cups cooked mashed potatoes	$\frac{1}{4}$ cup shredded carrots

Preheat oven to 375° F. Thaw vegetables. Put muffin papers in 6 cups in pan for large muffins, or spray 6 one-cup custard cups with cooking spray. Put custard cups on a baking sheet. Brown meat in skillet, stirring to break up lumps. Drain in colander, then blot with paper towels to remove grease. Spoon  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup cooked meat into each of the 6 cups. Top with  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of thawed vegetables. Spoon  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup tomatoes on top. Sprinkle with salt if desired, or salt-free seasoning. Put 2 Tbsp cheese on each one. Spread  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup potatoes over each cup and smooth to cover the cheese and vegetables. Bake 25 minutes. Heat rest of vegetables in microwave. Serve 1 meat cup to each person, with the rest of vegetables and carrots in small bowls for topping. Serves 6.

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