

Potato Nutrition: The Simple Facts



Potatoes deliver two of the four nutrients of concern for children – potassium and fiber. Failure to increase potassium and fiber in children’s diets can have serious long-term health consequences.

The Report of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010 identified potassium as a nutrient of concern specifically for children due to the public health importance and the fact that intakes are currently insufficient.¹

Adequate intake of dietary potassium lowers blood pressure and protects against stroke and cardiac arrhythmias, thus decreasing the risk that a child will develop hypertension and or suffer a stroke later in life.²

Children are not meeting their potassium requirements. Mean usual daily potassium intakes of students at all school levels were less than 100 percent of their respective Adequate Intakes (AIs).³

Potatoes are critical to students reaching potassium needs.

- Differences in potato consumption are consistent with observed differences in mean lunch intakes of potassium.⁴
- One medium serving of oven-baked French fries (114 grams) provides 474 mg potassium. This is more potassium than is provided by one medium banana (422 mg) – a food that is frequently cited as being high in potassium.³

Fiber is also a nutrient identified by the 2010 DGAC Report of which children consume inadequate levels.¹

- One serving of a baked potato has as much fiber as broccoli and provides 13 percent of the Daily Value. A serving of oven baked French fries has as much fiber as spinach and provides 9 percent of the Daily Value.⁵

Potatoes are a nutrient rich food. One medium baked potato (5.3 oz) provides only 110 calories and is an excellent source (providing more than 20% of the DV) of potassium, vitamin C and vitamin B6 and a good source (providing more than 10% of the DV) of fiber, folate, manganese, niacin and phosphorus.⁴

Children actually eat potatoes, even if they do not eat other vegetables. As the only vegetable consumed at breakfast, and the vegetable most often consumed at lunch, potatoes provide children with valuable nutrients throughout the day.

Potatoes are critical to vegetable consumption.

- Potatoes are the most commonly consumed vegetable by NSLP participants, making up ~30 percent of all vegetables eaten.³
- NSLP participants were more than twice as likely as nonparticipants to consume at least one vegetable (as a distinct food item) at lunch (51 versus 23 percent). These differences were driven primarily by differences in potato consumption.³
- The most commonly consumed vegetables at lunch by NSLP participants:³
 1. French fries/similar potato product (24 percent)
 2. White potatoes (7 percent)
 3. Green salads (non-entrée) (6 percent)
 4. Corn (6 percent)
 5. Deep yellow/dark green vegetables (6 percent)

Potatoes may help protect bone health in a more effective manner than other potassium sources.

According to the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, “Fruits and vegetables, which are rich in potassium with its bicarbonate precursors, favorably affect acid-base metabolism, which may reduce risk of kidney stones and bone loss....Meat, milk, and cereal products also contain potassium, but may not have the same effect on acid-base metabolism.”¹

One serving of French fries delivers 13 percent of the daily value for potassium for less than 5 cents.

According to SNDA III data⁶, French fries/potato products provide less than 5 percent of total energy, only 3 percent of sodium and 6 percent of total fat consumed at school lunch, yet they are:

- The #1 source of potassium for high school students – providing 13 percent of all potassium (#2 source for all ages combined)
- The #1 source of fiber for high school students – providing 8 percent of all fiber (#2 source for all ages combined)
- The #1 source of vitamin B6 for all ages – providing 10 percent of all B6
- Are among the top 10 sources of vitamin E, vitamin C, magnesium and phosphorus

Potatoes are more affordable than other vegetable options, higher in potassium than all other vegetables and similar to, if not higher, in fiber content.⁴

Oven baked French fries have almost triple the potassium and double the fiber as a serving of green peppers.

Oven baked French fries have 50 percent more vitamin C, more potassium and similar fiber as a serving of spinach.

Oven baked French fries have almost three times the potassium and a similar amount of fiber as a serving of broccoli.

Because kids actually eat them, potatoes do not waste schools' dollars.

Cooked potatoes are the most common vegetable consumed by NSLP participants.⁷

Students today are consuming more potatoes that are baked or boiled – not fried.

Industry-wide, foods are being produced in alternative ways with less sodium, fat, and calories, and school foodservice operations are doing the same. In 2007, 83 percent of schools baked 75 percent of all French fries.⁸

When they are fried, potatoes are cooked in oils that offer health benefits.

French fries deliver 10 essential vitamins and minerals.⁹

-
- ¹ 2010 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee. Report of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010. June 15, 2010.
 - ² Diet, nutrition and the prevention of hypertension and cardiovascular diseases. K Srinath Reddy and Martijn B Katan. *Public Health Nutrition*: 2004. 7(1A), 167–186.
 - ³ USDA, FNS, Office of Research, Nutrition, and Analysis. School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study – III: Summary of Findings, November 2007. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/MENU/published/CNP/FILES/SNDAlII-SummaryofFindings.pdf>
 - ⁴ School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study-III: Volume II: Student Participation and Dietary Intakes. *Final Report. Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., November 2007.* <http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/PDFs/SNDAvol2.pdf>
 - ⁵ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service. 2010. USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 23. Nutrient Data Laboratory Home Page, <http://www.ars.usda.gov/ba/bhnrc/nd/>
 - ⁶ School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study-III: Volume II: Student Participation and Dietary Intakes— Appendices. *Final Report. Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., November 2007.* <http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/PDFs/SNDAvol2appendix.pdf>
 - ⁷ USDA/FNS. 2008c. Diet Quality of American School-Age Children by School Lunch Participation Status: Data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 1999-2004. Alexandria, VA. USDA/FNS. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/CNP/FILES/SchoolMealsIOM.pdf>
 - ⁸ Y-Pulse Research, Food Service Director Survey, October, 2009.
 - ⁹ Fulgoni V, Keast D, Slavin J, MacDonald J, Munro C, Ramesh M. Nutritional Contribution of White Potatoes, French Fries, and Sweet Potatoes in the Diets of U. S. Adults: NHANES, 2003-2006. *J Am Dietetic Assn.* 2009;109:A28-A28.