

Potatoes for a healthy heart: Nutritional insights and tips



By Sheila Makgato, Potatoes SA

Every September, we celebrate Heart Awareness Month. This month is dedicated to raising awareness regarding cardiovascular disease in South Africa, culminating on World Heart Day on 29 September. The campaign serves to emphasise the importance of heart health and a healthy lifestyle.

Potatoes are a heart-healthy and tummy-satisfying addition to any diet. They are packed with essential nutrients such as vitamins C and B6, potassium, magnesium, folate, iron, and fibre, making them a nutrient-dense option.

Potassium and fibre benefits

Potassium helps counteract and balance sodium in the body, which is the main cause of hypertension. It does this by excreting sodium through urine. As a heart-healthy


nutrient, potassium reduces the risk of hypertension, which can lead to heart disease. Consuming potassium-rich foods such as potatoes can lower the chances of developing heart disease.

Fibre is well known for its benefits to gut health, but it also plays a crucial role in promoting heart health. It helps reduce cholesterol and stabilise blood sugar levels, contributing to a healthy heart. Foods such as potatoes, especially with the skin on, are high in fibre. Most of the fibre is found in the potato skin, which contains approximately half of the dietary fibre. Interestingly, baby potatoes have a higher fibre ratio, making them a smart choice for diets.

Good carbohydrates

According to the food-based dietary guidelines (FBDG) for South Africa, carbohydrates should be part of most balanced meals. The FBDG aims to promote the intake of sufficient dietary carbohydrates from minimally processed, traditional and indigenous foods rich in starch, such as some root vegetables including potatoes, whole grains, cereal products, and legumes. Good carbohydrates do not raise blood glucose levels quickly, unlike bad carbs such as biscuits and sugary sodas, which cause rapid spikes.

South Africa's diverse culture extends to its cooking, allowing for versatile meal preparations. Making potatoes the star and base of home-cooked meals, when prepared healthily, can increase nutrient intake and positively impact heart health, not forgetting that they are tasty too.

According to the Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa, 80% of heart diseases occurring before the age of 65 can be prevented by eating well, staying active, and not smoking. Potatoes have long been an important, cost-effective source of energy, nutrition, and satiety in the South African diet. As the most important vegetable crop in South Africa and one of the world's most recognised staple foods, potatoes continue to play an important role in diets, health, and well-being. 



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For more information, contact the author at sheila@potatoes.co.za and be sure to visit www.potatonation.co.za for delicious recipes and information regarding potatoes.

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VOL 38 NO 5 • SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2024

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