



Starch Sources

True or false: Starch is a term describing white foods that make you fat. That’s because they’re nothing but empty calories.

If you answered “true,” then you have fallen prey to one of the most pervasive nutritional myths circulating today. Here’s the skinny on starch:

First: Starch is a form of complex carbohydrate that is found in a variety of foods of all different colors. Foods that are high in starch include breads, grains, cereals, pasta, rice, potatoes, peas, corn and beans – in other words, grains, legumes and some vegetables.

Second: Starchy foods are generally low in fat or fat free, and low in sodium (except processed foods).

Finally: Starchy foods provide so much more than calories! Many starchy foods are also high in essential vitamins and minerals. The potato is a good example of a nutritious “starch.” A potato eaten with the skin offers important dietary fiber, is rich in vitamin C and an excellent source of potassium.

Eating potatoes can be good for heart health. In fact, the USDA confirms the following health claim, “Foods, such as potatoes, that are good sources of potassium and low in sodium, may reduce the risk of high blood pressure and stroke.”

Not all starches, however, can boast the same health benefits. See the table below for the nutrition profile of some popular starch foods:

	Calories	Fiber (grams)	Key vitamins ^{1,2}	Key minerals ^{1,2}
Potato with the skin (1 medium, 5.3 oz)	100	3 g	Vitamin C** Vitamin B ₆ *	Potassium**
Beans (baked, canned, 1/3 cup)	89	4 g	—	Phosphorus*
Corn (1 ear)	80	3 g	Vitamin C*	Potassium*
Green peas (½ cup)	58	3 g	Vitamin A* Vitamin C** Folate*	—
Spaghetti (cooked, enriched, ½ cup)	99	1 g	Folate*	Selenium**
White rice (long grain, cooked, enriched, ½ cup)	102	0 g	Folate*	—

**Excellent source

*Good source

To understand the role of starchy foods in the diet, it's helpful to know a little bit more about complex carbohydrates. These are large molecules that are "complex" because they are made from chains of smaller sugar molecules. Carbohydrates are not only the primary fuel for humans but for plants, as well. Humans store their carbohydrate as glycogen; plants store their carbohydrate as starch. And that's what makes starchy food starchy.

Your body needs a variety of foods in a balanced diet. But use a little nutrition sense when selecting starches. Choose starchy foods that contain dietary fiber, are close to their natural form (not overly processed), and are high in key nutrients.

Potatoes are a great catalyst for "sneaking" more vegetables into the diet. Try topping a baked potato with broccoli, mushrooms or salsa. Make meals more hearty and healthful by adding potato cubes to soups, stews or chilis. One reason potatoes are America's favorite vegetable is that they can be prepared a variety of ways to fit into any meal, any day.

1) USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 16

2) Pennington JAT. *Documentation for the 1995 Nutrition Labeling Values for the 20 Most Frequently Consumed Raw Fruits, Vegetables, and Fish*. Washington, D.C.: Food and Drug Administration; October 1995, revised June 1996

For healthy recipes and nutrition information, go to: www.healthypotato.com

