



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 a good source of potassium and vitamin B6.

In fact, the FDA confirms the following health claim, “Diets containing foods that are good sources of potassium and that are low in sodium, may reduce the risk of high blood pressure and stroke.”

The table below lists how potatoes stack up against other popular starch foods:

Food	Calories	Fiber (grams)	Key vitamins ^{1,2}	Key minerals ^{1,2}
Potato with the skin (1 medium, 5.3 oz)	110	2 g	Vitamin C** Vitamin B ₆ *	Potassium*
Beans (baked, canned, 1/3 cup)	79	3 g	--	Zinc*
Corn (1 ear)	90	2 g	Vitamin C*	--
Green (snap) beans (3/4 cup)	20	3 g	Vitamin C*	--
Spaghetti (cooked, enriched, ½ cup)	111	1 g	Folate*	Manganese* Selenium**
White rice (long grain, cooked, enriched, ½ cup)	103	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 (3).

- 1) US Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, 2006. USDA Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 19. Nutrient Data Laboratory homepage www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp
- 2) Department of Health and Human Services. Food and Drug Administration. 21 CFR Part 101. Docket No. 2001N-0548. Food Labeling; Guidelines for voluntary nutrition labeling of raw fruits, vegetables, and fish; correction. Federal Register Vol. 71, No. 159, Aug. 17, 2006.
- 3) USDA/Economic Research Service. Data last updated Feb. 15, 2007. Available at: www.ers.usda.gov/data/foodconsumption Accessed Mar. 19, 2007.

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

