

Contact: Allison Beadle, MS, RD, LD
Fleishman-Hillard
512-495-7176
allison.beadle@fleishman.com

Meredith Myers
United States Potato Board
303-873-2333
meredithm@uspotatoes.com

CELEBRATE AMERICAN HEART MONTH WITH A POTATO A DAY

Research Reinforces Potassium, Vital Nutrient for Heart Health, Abundant in Potatoes

Denver, CO (February 1, 2009) – Want to do something good for your heart during American Heart Month? Find new ways to increase your intake of potassium. This nutrient can help reduce the risk of high blood pressure promote heart health. Little known to most Americans is the fact that potatoes are a good source of potassium. In fact, researchers at Deakin University found a significant inverse association between usual potato intake and diastolic blood pressure among 91 participants in a dietary intervention study aimed at reducing blood pressure.

“For every 100 gram increase (one medium size potato = 150 grams) in total potato intake, there was a 2.6 unit drop in diastolic blood pressure, which is likely to be due to the potassium content of potatoes, as we found that dietary intake of potatoes was associated with 24 hour urinary excretion of potassium,” explained Dr Caryl Nowson, lead scientist of the study.

In fact, potatoes rank highest for potassium content among the top 20 most frequently consumed raw vegetables and the top 20 most frequently consumed raw fruits (1). In fact, one medium potato (5.3 ounces) with the skin contains 620 mg of potassium. That’s 18% of your daily requirement and more than a banana.

Heart disease remains America’s number one killer. It is estimated that one out of every three Americans is at high risk, and sadly most don’t even know it. Luckily some simple dietary modifications can go a long way towards reducing several of the key risk factors for heart disease. One of the most powerful, yet lesser known, is increasing potassium intake. Potassium is an electrolyte--that’s essential for the body’s growth and maintenance. It’s necessary to keep a normal water balance between the cells and body fluids. Potassium also plays an essential role in the response of nerves to stimulation and in the contraction of muscles, including the heart muscle.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration reports that diets containing foods that are a good source of potassium and that are low in sodium may reduce the risk of high blood pressure and stroke. It just so happens that potatoes, America’s Favorite Vegetable, are sodium free, fat-free and just 110 calories per serving.

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Maintaining a healthy body weight is also essential for heart health, but keeping weight down *and* eating a diet high in potassium is even better. A study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition (2) examined the effect on blood pressure of two weight reduction diets. The first diet was designed to be low in fat, and the second was a moderate sodium, high potassium, high calcium, low-fat diet in which participants were instructed to eat at least four servings of vegetables a day (one serving= ½ cup cooked vegetables (50 g), 1 cup salad vegetables or one medium potato).

“The results indicated that weight loss was the same in both groups and blood pressure also dropped for both groups,” explains Dr. Katherine Beals, R.D., FACSM and a nutrition consultant to the United States Potato Board (USPB). “However, the group that consumed the high-potassium diet had a significantly greater decrease in blood pressure compared to the low-fat diet group.”

Potassium has health benefits beyond heart factors. Research has indicated that diets high in fruits and vegetables that are particularly rich in potassium may help maintain lean body mass and bone mineral density as we age (3, 4).

In these tough economic times, finding affordable foods that are also a good source of potassium becomes even more important. For just 25 cents per serving potatoes are by far the most cost effective ways of meeting your daily potassium quota not to mention, they remain one of the best values in the produce aisle. To get more potassium into your diet in an easy, delicious way, visit www.potatogoodness.com for nutritious potato recipes and usage ideas.

- (1) DHHS FDA 21 CFR Part 101, Docket No. 2001N-0548, Food Labeling; Guidelines for Voluntary Nutrition Labeling of Raw Fruits, Vegetables, and Fish; Correction)
- (2) Nowson CA. et al, Blood pressure in changes with weight loss is affected by diet type in men. *Am J Clin Nutr.* 2005; 81:983-989.
- (3) Dawson-Hughes B. et al. Alkaline diets favor lean tissue mass in older adults. *Am J Clin Nutr.* 2008; 87:662-665.
- (4) Tucker KL. et al. Potassium, magnesium and fruit and vegetable intakes are associated with greater bone mineral density in elderly men and women. *Am J Clin Nutr.* 1999; 69:727-736.

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The United States Potato Board (USPB) was established in 1971 by a group of potato growers to promote the benefits of eating potatoes. Recognized as an innovator in the produce marketing industry, the USPB adopted a new campaign signature in 2008. “*Potatoes... Goodness Unearthed™*” showcases the appeal of naturally nutrient-rich potatoes, also known as America’s Favorite Vegetable. Based in Denver, Colo., the USPB represents more than 4,000 potato

growers and handlers across the country. To unearth more goodness about the USPB and its programs, visit www.potatogoodness.com.