

**Q:** Can people with diabetes eat potatoes?

**A:** According to the American Diabetes Association (ADA), starchy vegetables such as potatoes *can* be included in the diet of a person with diabetes. The total amount of carbohydrate consumed at any given meal or snack is what is most important.<sup>1</sup>

## ORIGIN

The concern regarding potatoes and diabetes stems largely from the type of carbohydrate found in potatoes (starch). Starch is a complex carbohydrate that is not only found in potatoes but also in bread, pasta, peas and corn. Starch tends to be digested and absorbed rapidly which can lead to a sharp increase in blood glucose levels, an effect known as a *high glycemic response*.<sup>2</sup> For people with Type 2 diabetes, a food eliciting a high glycemic response can be problematic because they do not efficiently and effectively clear glucose from the blood. Chronically high levels of blood glucose can cause great damage to body tissues and systems.

It's important to note that the type of carbohydrate is only one dietary factor that can affect blood glucose levels. The total amount of carbohydrate consumed at a given meal (referred to as the *glycemic load*) also impacts blood glucose levels and often to a much greater degree than the type of carbohydrate. Thus, people with Type 2 diabetes should focus on carbohydrate portion size when planning, creating and consuming meals.<sup>1,3</sup>

## FACTS

- A 5.3 oz potato with the skin contains 26 grams of total carbohydrate (including 2 grams of fiber).
- The effect of potatoes on an individual's blood glucose level (i.e., glycemic response) is highly variable and depends on a number of factors including:<sup>4</sup>
  - Processing and preparation
  - Variety, origin, maturation
  - What they are consumed with (i.e. protein and fat)
- Potatoes that have been cooked and cooled elicit a low glycemic response.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, consuming warm potatoes with other foods, particularly those higher in fat and protein, will lower the glycemic response.<sup>5,6</sup>
- The ADA encourages both children and adults with diabetes to focus on carbohydrates from vegetables, legumes, fruits, dairy (milk and yogurt), and whole grains and reduce their intake of refined carbohydrates and added sugars.<sup>3</sup>

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## REFERENCES

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