

Picking Potatoes



When you see the title of this article you might conjure up in your mind a vision of digging the tubers out of the ground.

And that would be incorrect.

Not many of us find ourselves picking potatoes out of the ground.

We choose our potatoes at the grocery store.

I call that picking potatoes.

Historically the “mother of all potatoes” is the russet. Those of us who adore potatoes can visualize (and practically taste in our heads) a baked russet potato cut open, fluffed up, dripping with butter and maybe even covered in shavings of grated cheddar cheese and sour cream. BIG YUM.

But did you know that innocent looking russet potato packs a whopping 67 grams of carbohydrates?

And who doesn't eat the whole thing? They are hard to resist.

When I was a kid, my mother used to plop a whole baker on my plate. I cut it open and scooped out the flesh. I smashed the

flesh with a fork and piled on the butter, salt and pepper. Then I would take the skins, stuff a pat of butter into each of those and when I polished off the potato flesh I'd attack the skins like they were dessert.

Now I know that potato was the equivalent of a dessert.

One piece of cheesecake equals 32 grams of carbs. The baked potato beats that big time at 67 grams!

One of the secrets I learned is to choose other potatoes at the grocery store.

There are other options for potatoes that might not be lower in carbs for a serving of 100 grams (about a half cup) but they are easier to eat in smaller portions, get the satisfaction and not have such a high spike of insulin that is produced from the russet or Idaho potato. And how you cook them matters too.

Potatoes can have a high glycemic index (GI) – a measurement of how quickly a food raises blood sugar—and are linked to weight gain. But Katelyn Castro, a dietetic intern at Tufts' Frances Stern Nutrition Center, says, "The type of potatoes and preparation methods have a big impact on its glycemic response. Recent studies have found that waxy potatoes, like fingerling and red potatoes, have a lower glycemic index than starchy potatoes, like Russet and Idaho potatoes. The cooking method also alters the glycemic index of a potato. Boiled and roasted potatoes have the lowest GI (both 59), while baked potatoes are higher (69) and mashed and instant potatoes have the highest GI (78 and 82, respectively)

So here are my choices these days for the potatoes I pick at the grocery store.

Fingerlings. You've seen those skinny, shorter potatoes that

sort of look like pudgy fingers? They come in red, white and purple. I buy those and cut them into coin shapes. Then I boil them. Only takes about 10 minutes as opposed to over an hour for a baked potato. Then, ideally, I let them cool down. The cooler they get the lower the glycemic index (or blood sugar spike). If you can cook them in the morning (or even the night before) and refrigerate them all the better.

When I want to eat them, I smash them up with a fork and pile in butter, maybe sour cream or even whipping cream. I call these smashed potatoes.

Or my new favorite it to sauté them in a combo of half butter, half olive oil. They taste almost like little French fries (only better).

Anytime you eat potatoes, the healthiest thing you can do is add butter, cheese, sour cream or any fat. The fat slows down the digestion and therefore the glycemic index and glycemic uptake (the rate at which your sugar rises).

Baby C-sized potatoes are another good option. The younger the potato the fewer the carbs and the lower the glycemic index. Look for the red round ones that are about an inch across in size. This is an easy option too because you can cook them the same way I describe above and keep your portion small. Just stay under a half cup with either of these potatoes and your carb intake will range around 20 grams. That's a lot better than 67!

And lastly, there's a new option on the horizon. It's called the Carisma potato.

The Carisma potato has 30% fewer carbs than average potatoes. And that's a GAME CHANGER! Let's hope these guys get national distribution soon. So far I haven't been able to find them Rumor was Whole Foods carries them but I checked with two stores and

the produce managers and they've never heard of them.

The Carisma potato was developed by a hobbyist gardener in the Netherlands (Holland). Then it made its way to New Zealand and Australia. Those countries are both WAY ahead of the United States in paying attention to carbs. In those countries, the TV commercials will even tell you how many carbs per serving their products have; even things like breakfast cereal! They really are smart people.

These days Carisma potatoes are grown in Canada so it's not like they have to be shipped really far for us to get them. I haven't heard they are grown in the US yet but I hope they are soon.

Keep an eye out for them and if you see them write and tell me!

Cheers,