



I am more good than bad. My name is potato. In one way I am one of the oldest and in another sense I am one of the latest. In the ancient ruins of Peru and Chile, archaeologists have found my remains that date back to 500 B.C. In October 1995, I became the first vegetable to be grown in space. NASA and the University of Wisconsin, Madison, created the technology with the goal of feeding astronauts on long space voyages, and eventually, feeding future space colonies. So, the next time you hold me in your hand remember you are not just holding a vegetable, but a piece of history.

The Inca Indians in Peru were the first to cultivate me. They were impressed by my ruggedness, storage quality and nutritional value. The Incas not only grew and ate me, but also worshipped me. They even buried me with their

'Potato is not good for health' is a wrong notion. It contains lot of nutritional values. But it all depends on how one eats it and what are the other ingredients that are added to it that determines its good or ill effects on one's health.

dead. They used to stash me in concealed bins for use during war or famine. The Incas called me 'papas'. Believe me, this is the Inca prayer. "O Creator! Thou who givest life to all things and hast made men that they may live, and multiply. Multiply also the fruits of the earth, the potatoes and other food that thou hast made, that men may not suffer from hunger and misery."

Of course, I also have some idiosyncrasies associated with me. The German King Frederick William realised I was a good food source and ordered peasants to

plant and eat me or their noses would be cut off. Sir Walter Raleigh introduced me to Ireland in 1589 by planting me on 40,000 acres of land that was given to him by Queen Elizabeth I.

In 1853 railroad magnate Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt complained that his potatoes (that's me) were cut too thick and sent me back to the kitchen at a fashionable resort in Saratoga Springs, New York. To spite his haughty guest, Chef George Crum sliced some potatoes (again that's me) paper thin, fried me in hot oil, salted me and served me in a new form. To

everyone's surprise, Vanderbilt loved his 'Saratoga Crunch Chips', and I, in the name of 'potato chips', have not only become very popular ever since, but today I have become a multicore industry.

With time, I have become one of the major foodstuff of the world. My road was no bed of roses; I did have lots of bumps in the road. People understood my drawbacks more often than my advantage. People considered me poisonous. People experienced disastrous potato blight. Blight is basically a disease. This terrible disease within me was caused by a fungus. With this came my devastation throughout Europe. Much later, a French botanist found an effective fungicide during 1880's. Yes, I was saved. Thanks to the botanist, I became very popular and widely accepted in the world thereafter. Today I am so common, plentiful and pervasive in the diet that I am taken for granted.

Basically I am a weedy plant recognised for my tuberous growth. I am from a family of nightshade and my leaves are indeed poisonous. I come in hundreds of varieties and in many sizes, shapes

and colours. But despite the differences, the fact remains we all have same nutritional value.

Over the years I have earned a very bad name - so much so that they think of me and say I am fattening. The problem is not me, but it's the way you prepare me. A few, handful of potato chips has the same number of calories as two medium-sized, baked potatoes topped with zero-fat yogurt and steamed vegetables. Those of you who enjoy adding oil to me, topping me with cheese, frying and deep-frying till you see the dark brown crust, French fries and other buttered stuff - now, you are in trouble. Actually, it is these combinations which make you suffer. That's bad for you and your blood stream which will lead to many diseases. Of course, because of my high carbohydrate content, diabetic people should avoid me.

I am here to remind you that by nature I am fat-free and cholesterol-free. I am essentially here to clarify that I am not fattening you. I am healthy and nutritious depending upon your preparation. The good news is that you no more have to

feel guilty about including me in your treats.

I am fuss-free and lend myself to be transformed magically into the tastiest of dishes. I definitely do not have to tell you how tasty I am. If there is one universally liked and readily available, and is an economical ingredient, it is me. I am so versatile that you can serve me with any dish of yours. In various dishes I am used as a binding agent. I am available all through the year. I represent excellent value for money. Studies reveal that I am cool, delicious, heavy and dry, and have energising qualities. Do you know that I am one of the most nutritious staple crops discovered by man?

I am absorbed by your body within two and half hours of eating me. Talking about my nutritional properties, I contain more potassium than a banana. I contain nearly half of the recommended daily intake of Vitamin C. I am one of the best sources of carbohydrates, the body's best energy source. I have ample supply of Vitamin B6, which helps to bolster immunity. I contain as much fibre as a 1/3 cup serving of

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oat bran. I am a very good source of zinc, iron, phosphorous and magnesium. I am low in calories and fat as well as sodium, and I am cholesterol-free. I am 80% water. All virtues of cereals are imbibed in me. The nutrients in me are easily digestible. The best way to have me is to take me with my skin. My skin is a good source of fibre and potassium.

Scurvy in Europe has become more and more uncommon with my increase. My juice gives good relief to the patients suffering from duodenal ulcers. There have been encouraging results in several skin diseases especially eczema. I am an alkaline food which means I am good for people suffering from hyperacidity. In beauty care, my face packs are good for the dry pigmented skin.

I do have some disagreeable traits. If left for a long time, I begin to turn green. Greening is caused when I am exposed to light and it is poisonous. You must refrain from eating when I am damaged or turn green in colour. This can create gastrointestinal

disturbances including nausea, vomiting, and diarrhoea, and cause haemolytic and hemorrhagic damage to the gastrointestinal tract. That's why you need to be careful while eating me with the skin.

I am very useful to you. But I have my conditions. If you adhere to them, I will do all the good to your health. If not, you might lose my vital properties. You should cut me only when you require me. If I am left cut for a long time, I lose my vitamin C content. If you peel me before I am steamed or boiled, my nutrients are lost. I am very choosy about my place - I need to be kept in dark but dry place. I should not be stored in the fridge as my flavour will change. I shouldn't be kept close to onions as gases released by the onions can increase my decay.

Boil, bake, and steam me. I can be a valuable adjunct to a balanced diet. That's the truth. The positives weigh well above my negative qualities. I am in your hands; you can make me good or bad for you. Please then don't blame me if people call you couch potatoes!!

What Ayurveda has to say about Potato?

- Dr. Monica Chitnavis,
Prakriti Ayurvedic Natural Rejuvenation Centre

Ayurveda considers me as Brihanam, i.e., which is good to build up the body tissues. I am considered good as long as a person is healthy, but in an unhealthy body I should not be included. I increase the *vata* and the *kapha* of the body. So I should not be consumed when there are diseases of skin and joints. As I am a little heavy to digest, it is better I am avoided in an unhealthy body. Since my qualities change according to the climatic conditions, I do not create problems in extreme climates, but I do create problems in humid climates. Of course, I am useful to remove blemishes. I am also useful in the raw form for external applications, in treating swelling and disordered conditions of the joints and muscles.