**Potatoes**

1. What is a Potato
2. Potato belongs to the Solanaceae (So-la-notch-ay) family whose other members include tomatoes, eggplants, peppers and tomatillos.
3. The scientific name *Solanum tuberosum* is derived from a Latin word meaning “soothing”.
4. Maybe that’s why potatoes are toward the top of the “comfort foods” list.
5. They are not the root, but are actually the swollen portion of the underground stem, which is called the tuber. This portion of the plan is designed to provide food for the green leafy portion of the plant.
6. If allowed to flower and fruit, the potato plant will bear an inedible fruit resembling a tomato.
7. Mature potatoes are what we generally think of with Russets or basically are potatoes that have the thick skin. New potatoes, are generally the smaller ones, but they can be large. True new potatoes, which are freshly dug potatoes, have thin “feathering” skins that brush off easily with your fingers.
8. History of Potatoes
9. Potatoes originated in the Andean mountain region of South America.
10. Researchers estimate that potatoes have been cultivated by the Indians living in these areas for 4,000-7,000 years.
11. Potatoes were able to be grown at the high altitudes of this region and therefore became a staple for the peoples of the Andes
12. Spanish explorers brought them back to Europe in the 1500’s but they were not widely consumed despite it being inexpensive to produce.
13. People knew it was related to the nightshade family and thought it was poisonous like other members of this family.
14. Some people thought eating potatoes would cause leprosy.
15. Others regarded it with suspicion because potatoes were not mentioned in the Bible.

**The Irish Potato Famine**…by the 1800’s Irish peasants were eating an average of 10 potatoes/day. Potatoes supplied about 80% of the calories in their diet, and potato fodder was used to feed animals which provided milk, meat and eggs. In the 1840’s, three successive years of blight and heavy rains rotted the potato crops in the ground. An estimated 3/4 – 1 million died of starvation and another 2 million emigrated. The population of Ireland has never recovered!

1. The power of fear…Frederick the Great, the Prussian ruler, ordered people to plant and eat potatoes as a deterrent to famine, fear of this plant’s safety prevented them from doing so. So he enforced his orders by threatening to cut off the nose and ears of those who refused. Not surprisingly, this was effective.
2. Spanish explorers understood better than most that potatoes were special. They used them to prevent scurvy.
3. Not until the 18th century did the potato become more widely popular in Europe.
4. Potato was first brought to the US by Irish immigrants in the early 18th century, but large scale cultivation did not occur in the U.S. until the 19th century.
5. Nutrition & Health Benefits of Potatoes
6. First let’s clear up one thing…the majority of nutrients are NOT found in the skin of the potato. Sure, the skin is also a good source of nutrients, but by and large most of the nutrition is inside!
7. When we talk about the health benefits of potatoes, we really need to remember that we aren’t saying all of the ways we eat potatoes are healthy. Anyone want to guess what I’m talking about here?? (French fries, potato chips, slathered in gravy, etc.)
8. Potatoes are an excellent source of vitamins and minerals.
9. Vitamin C
10. One potato provides 45% of your daily vitamin C requirement.
11. Vitamin C acts as an antioxidant which helps prevent damage to cells. It also helps maintain healthy gums, heals wounds, boosts iron absorption and supports the body’s immune system.
12. Potassium
13. Potatoes have more potassium per serving than any other fruit or vegetable, including bananas and oranges! REALLY!
14. Potassium is important for blood pressure control, muscle contraction and nerve conduction.
15. Vitamin B-6
16. This vitamin is involved in over 100 reactions in the body, especially related to metabolism of protein and carbohydrates.
17. Also important for brain, nervous system and cardiovascular system.
18. Only 110 calories and zero fat for a medium sized potato.
19. Fiber – 2 grams of fiber per serving.
20. Fiber is the part of the plant that the body cannot fully digest.
21. Fiber is good for lowering risk of heart disease, diabetes and obesity.
22. **Carbohydrates!! This is a good thing! Carbohydrates are the body’s primary fuel source. Muscles prefer them and the brain relies on them!**
23. **When consumed in normal amounts…**

**…Carbohydrates DO NOT automatically cause blood sugar “spikes” and insulin “surges”**

**…Carbohydrates DO NOT cause weight gain and obesity.**

1. **Potatoes provide both simple and complex carbohydrates.**
2. Antioxidants
3. Potatoes are a rich source of many antioxidants other than vitamin C.
4. Antioxidants are important in keeping cells healthy and reducing the risk of many diseases.
5. Antioxidants are also important in reducing inflammation.
6. The pigments that give red and purple potatoes their color have antioxidant properties. While certainly not in the same quantity, these are the same pigments that make grape juice, blueberries, beets and other fruits/vegetables healthy.

1. Selection, Storage and Handling of Potatoes
2. Let’s skip the obvious stuff about avoiding the bruised, shriveled, blah blah blah.
3. It is generally better to buy them individually from bulk display so you can inspect them but that’s not always an option. If you can find plastic bags that are perforated, that is better so moisture can’t build up and cause decay.
4. Avoid potatoes that are sprouting or have green coloration. Yes, the green actually contains a toxic substance. It won’t kill you, but it can give you a case of diarrhea! It also tastes bad so why would you want to eat it?
5. Since new potatoes are actually harvested before they are fully mature, they are much more susceptible to damage.
6. The ideal way to store potatoes is in a dark, dry place 45-50 degrees F. Do not store in the refrigerator because that will actually cause some of the starch to convert to sugar and give the potatoes an undesirable taste.
7. **Don’t store near onions! Both foods actually release gases during storage and the gases that each emits actually causes the other food to break down.**
8. Mature potatoes stored properly can keep up to two months. New potatoes are much more perishable. It’s best to store potatoes in burlap or paper bag.
9. Potato Fun Facts
10. The potato is about 80 % water and 20% solids.
11. The average American eats about 140 pounds of potatoes per year while Germans eat about more than 200 pounds.
12. The potato skin actually changes its chemical structure after it is harvested. The outer layers thicken and harden and their cells are converted to the same substance found in bottle cork. Yes, the skin is edible.
13. Thomas Jefferson gets the credit for introducing French Fries to America when he served them at a White House dinner.
14. Sweet potatoes are not a relative of the potato.
15. Marie Antoinette paraded in France wearing a crown of potato blossoms thus creating some enthusiasm for the potato.
16. According to Guinness the largest potato every grown was 18 pounds 4 ounces and was grown in 1795 in England.
17. The potato is grown in all 50 states and in about 125 countries worldwide.
18. Folklore abounds about the potato. A peeled potato in the pocket was assumed to cure a toothache and a dried potato worn around the neck would help rheumatism.
19. Vincent Van Gogh painted four still-life canvases devoted entirely to the potato.
20. Gold Rush miners prized the potato, high in vitamin C, because it prevented scurvy. Men traded gold for the precious potato, ounce for ounce. At today's average gold price, a medium potato would cost a fortune.
21. Origins of the word "spud" can be traced to the instrument used to dig potatoes from the ground. . . the SPADE!
22. The Mr. Potato Head doll was born in 1952 and was introduced to Mrs. Potato Head in 1953. According to Playskool, Inc., the two honeymooned in Boise, Idaho and have 12 children. In 1987, Mr. Potato Head gave up his pipe to set a good example for children.
23. The average person eats the equivalent of 96 one-ounce bags of potato chips each year. That's 6 pounds a year.
24. In 1952, someone tossed several bags of potato chips over Niagara Falls. The bags were recovered unharmed and promptly eaten by spectators.
25. People in Shakespeare's time viewed the potato as an aphrodisiac and labeled them "Apples of Love."
26. In parts of Europe and America it was thought that warts could be cured by rubbing them with a raw potato.
27. It takes 10,000 pounds of potatoes to make 3,500 pounds of potato chips. It takes zero potatoes to make one Mr. Potato Head!
28. Potato activities
29. Show fingerling potatoes and purple potatoes if you can find any.
30. Use potatoes in a dessert or some other recipe that you wouldn’t think to use them.
31. Show boxes/cans of various processed potato products and point out the sodium content. ( AuGratin potatoes, instant potatoes, canned potatoes, canned potato soup, etc.)