

Healthy Potatoes

Greg Daniels loves potatoes.

Greg grew up on a potato farm. He's been surrounded by potatoes for most of this life. He went away for college. But he came back home soon after graduation. Now he teaches high school science and horticulture classes. He spends weekends and summers helping his father on the family potato farm, just like he did when he was a kid. His goal is to help his students understand and appreciate the agricultural roots of the area in which they live.

Recently there have been news reports about the quality of school lunches. According to federal guidelines, French fries count as a serving of vegetables. Many parents and others were upset that a salty, deep-fried food was being served. They thought healthier options like carrot sticks or cucumbers would be better. As a result, the potato – what French fries are made of – has been getting a bad rap.

“The problem is not the potato,” insists Greg. “Potatoes are very healthy. But any food, even carrots or lettuce, will be less healthy if it's cooked in grease.”

An order of French fries can have 500 calories or more. They have over 25 grams of fat. That's half of the fat that an adult should eat for an entire day.

A medium-sized plain baked potato has 170 calories. It has less than 1 gram of fat. Potatoes are also high in fiber. Fiber helps a person feel full and helps their digestive system work more effectively. Potatoes have vitamins C and B. They are a great source of potassium,

a nutrient which helps maintain heartbeat and regulates fluid levels throughout the body.

“Potatoes are a healthy choice if they're prepared correctly,” says Greg. “Frying the potatoes or piling on butter and sour cream just add fat. But there are lots of ways potatoes can be prepared that keeps them healthy and that taste fantastic.”

To prove his point, Greg has made a pledge to eat nothing but potatoes for sixty days. “I want to draw attention to how healthy potatoes really are. I'm not going to eat any French fries. I'm not going to load my potatoes up with toppings. I want to enjoy the taste of the potato.”

That was three weeks ago. Now 21 days into his 60 day plan, Greg admits he's getting a little tired of the tuber.

“This morning I had hash browns for breakfast. I had mashed potatoes seasoned with ranch dressing mix for lunch. And for dinner I had red potatoes broiled with olive oil and chives. Everything tasted great, but I do miss having some variety. Mostly I miss having dessert. I eat a piece of potato every night after dinner and pretend it's a piece of chocolate.”

Greg's pleased with the attention that he's getting as a result. And he's pleased with the attention potatoes are getting. He's writing a daily blog about the experience. He's been interviewed for newspaper stories. He appeared on the local morning news last week.

“Potatoes are good. I want everyone to eat them!” Greg says with a smile. “But I think maybe 30 days of potatoes would have been enough.”

Healthy Potatoes – After

“Well, I made it,” says Greg Daniels with a smile.

Two months ago, Greg made a pledge to eat nothing but potatoes for 60 days. Greg is a high school science teacher and son of a potato farmer. He wanted to do something to draw attention to potatoes as a healthy food. He says potatoes are a good choice to be part of anyone’s regular meals.

“It’s been an interesting experience,” Greg said. “For a while, I’ll admit I wasn’t sure I would make it. I was pretty tired of eating potatoes after a few weeks.”



But for Greg there were some benefits that he hadn’t expected. He’s lost 15 pounds. He says he feels better than he has in years. “I have so much more energy,” he says. “I’ve been running and playing on a local basketball team. I feel like I’m playing as well as I did when I was in high school.”

And Greg has gotten a lot of attention, much more than he expected. “It’s been fantastic. Thousands of people have read my blog. I’ve

been sharing recipes and talking about the experience. Every day I get to tell people what a great idea it is to eat potatoes.”

Greg and his wife were also interviewed in their home for a national morning news show. The show is watched by millions of people every day.

Greg ate mostly russet potatoes, the brown potatoes most commonly used for baking. These are the potatoes grown on his family’s farm.

“We got creative too,” says Greg, “to try to get some variety. I’ve had Yukon Gold potatoes, red potatoes, even these amazing blue potatoes. I’ve had them baked, mashed, boiled, broiled and roasted. I’ve had hash browns for breakfast almost every day. My wife and I also tried some new recipes like latkes, a kind of potato pancake. We’ve tried potato dumplings, homemade baked potato chips, and Irish potato soup.”

Greg says that it’s hard for him to pick a favorite. “The only thing I tried and didn’t like was lemon juice on potatoes. Oh, and one time I tried a little chocolate sauce on a potato. I really, really wanted a dessert, but that was not a good combination.”

Greg is glad to be back to a normal diet, but he still eats potatoes at least 5 or 6 times a week. “Everyone should!” he says with a smile. “Potatoes are healthy and taste great!”