



Baked Potato – An Easy Winter Supper

More potatoes are eaten around the world than any other vegetable, about 140 pounds per person per year. Unfortunately more than 60 percent of that amount is in the form of French fries or snacks that have unhealthy fats and lots of sodium.

Potatoes can be a healthy addition to the diet depending on how they are prepared. Baked potatoes are a good source of several nutrients. Four-ounces of plain baked potato with skin has 133 calories, 3 grams protein, 3 grams fiber, 510 milligrams of potassium as well as 25% of B6, 17 % of vitamin C and 21% of iron needed each day. Potatoes contain no cholesterol and only a trace of fat.

Choosing and Storing Potatoes

Look for clean, smooth, well-shaped potatoes, free of sprouts. Potatoes should feel firm and skins should be free of cracks, wrinkles or dampness.

The best storage area is cool (45° to 50° F), dark and dry. Light and warmth encourage sprouting. Do not refrigerate, this will turn the starch to sugar giving them a sweet taste. Store potatoes in a brown paper or perforated plastic bag. Check occasionally and remove any that have sprouted, softened or shriveled. Mature potatoes will keep for up to 2 months.

Preparing Potatoes

Potatoes can be prepared in many ways. First wash and scrub each potato under running cool water. Dry thoroughly. Baked potatoes are very versatile and may be used as a main course or side dish.



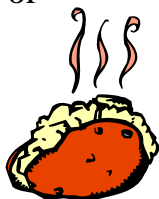
Oven Baked – Heat oven to 425°F. Pierce potato in several places to allow steam to escape. Place potato on oven rack or baking sheet. Bake 40 to 55

minutes or until tender when pierced with a fork. The number of potatoes being baked does not change the baking time. To bake in less time, cut a medium-sized potato in half lengthwise, brush cut sides with vegetable oil. Bake, flat sides down, on well-greased baking sheet at 375°F for 25 to 35 minutes or until tender. For a softer skin, lightly rub the potato with oil or softened butter before baking.

Microwave Baked – Pierce 1 potato several times to allow steam to escape. Place in microwave oven: microwave on high (100% power) until tender. Turn potato over halfway through cook time. For medium-size potatoes, microwave 4 to 4-1/2 minutes. For larger potatoes, microwave 5 to 9 minutes. Allow potato to stand in microwave 1 to 2 minutes to finish cooking.

Baked Potato Variations

Chili-Topped – Top split baked potato with heated prepared chili, homemade or canned. Sprinkle with shredded cheese and chopped green onion; add a dollop of sour cream.



Ham and Cheese Melt – Fill split baked potato with strips of cooked ham, sprinkle with shredded cheese and microwave until cheese melts.

Vegetable Filled – Fill split baked potato with chopped vegetable, cooked or raw. Top with shredded cheese and microwave until cheese melts. Clean chopped raw vegetables or cooked leftover vegetables may be used. Chopped broccoli with cheese is especially good.

Low-fat toppings – Reduced fat or fat free sour cream, cream cheese, or plain yogurt make good toppings. Your favorite salsa makes a good topping; if you like, you could add a small amount of shredded cheese.

Prepared by:

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Baked Potato Soup

2 tablespoons butter, margarine or vegetable oil
2 tablespoons flour
1-1/2 cups skim milk
2 large potatoes, baked
1/3 cup sour cream

Mix together butter or oil and flour, cook over low to medium heat. When slightly thickened, gradually add milk and continue cooking until thickened.

Peel and cut up baked potatoes. You may want to mash some of the potato. Add potatoes to the milk mixture. Blend in sour cream. Serve hot. Serves 2.

Nutrition information per serving: 320 calories, 15 g fat, 5 mg cholesterol, 115 mg sodium, 37 g carbohydrate.

Sweet Potatoes

For variety, don't forget the Sweet potato. It may be baked in the oven or microwave oven following the directions above. Nutritionally it is similar to the white potato, but a 4 ounce serving will also provide 100 % of the vitamin A needed for the day. Baked sweet potatoes are delicious plain or may topped with a small amount of brown sugar and sprinkled with ground cinnamon or nutmeg.

