Bananas: Health Benefits, Risks and Nutritional Facts

Bananas are one of the most widely consumed fruits in the world for good reason. The curved yellow fruit packs a big nutritional punch, wrapped in its own convenient packaging. Some scientists believe that the banana may have even been the world’s first fruit.

Today, bananas are grown in at least 107 countries and are ranked fourth among the world’s food crops in monetary value. Americans consume more bananas than apples and oranges combined.

With the world consuming so many bananas, it’s unsurprising that people are asking the question are bananas good for you? This paper will take a look at the potential health benefits of bananas, such as lowering the risks of cancer and asthma, lowering blood pressure, improving heart health and promoting regularity. It also examines the possible health risks associated with them.

**Nutritional breakdown of Bananas**

One medium banana (about 126 grams) is considered to be one serving. One serving of banana contains 110 calories, 30 grams of carbohydrate and 1 gram of protein. Bananas are naturally free of fat, cholesterol and sodium.

**Bananas provide a variety of vitamins and minerals:**

- Vitamin B6 - .5 mg
- Manganese - .3 mg
- Vitamin C - 9 mg
- Potassium - 450 mg
- Dietary Fiber - 3g
- Protein - 1 g
- Magnesium - 34 mg
- Folate - 25.0 mcg
- Riboflavin - .1 mg
- Niacin - .8 mg
- Vitamin A - 81 IU
- Iron - .3 mg

**Health benefits of Bananas**

- **Blood pressure:** Maintaining a low sodium intake is essential to lowering blood pressure, however increasing potassium intake may be just as important because of its vasodilation effects. According to the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, fewer than 2% of US adults meet the daily 4700 mg recommendation. Also of note, a high potassium intake is associated with a 20% decreased risk of dying from all causes.

- **Asthma:** A study conducted by the Imperial College of London found that children who ate just one banana per day had a 34% less chance of developing asthma.

- **Cancer:** Consuming bananas, oranges and orange juice in the first two years of life may reduce the risk of developing childhood leukemia. As a good source of vitamin C, bananas can help combat the formation of free radicals known to cause cancer. High fiber intakes from fruits and vegetables like bananas are associated with a lowered risk of colorectal cancer.

- **Heart health:** The fiber, potassium, vitamin C and B6 content in bananas all support heart health. An increase in potassium intake along with a decrease in sodium intake is the most important dietary change that a person can make to reduce their risk of cardiovascular disease.

  In one study, those who consumed 4069 mg of potassium per day had a 49% lower risk of death from ischemic heart disease compared with those who consumed less potassium (about 1000 mg per day).

  High potassium intakes are also associated with a reduced risk of stroke, protection against loss of muscle mass, preservation of bone mineral density and reduction in the formation of kidney stones.

**Diabetes:** Studies have shown that type 1 diabetics who consume high-fiber diets have lower blood glucose levels and type 2 diabetics may have improved blood sugar, lipids and insulin levels. One medium banana provides about 3 grams of fiber.

**Facts about Bananas**

- Bananas help overcome depression due to high levels of tryptophan, which is converted into serotonin - the happy-mood brain neurotransmitter.
- Eat two bananas before a strenuous workout to pack an energy punch and sustain your blood sugar.
- Protect against muscle cramps during workouts and nighttime leg cramps by eating a banana.
- Counteract calcium loss during urination and build strong bones by supplementing with a banana.
- Improve your mood and reduce PM S symptoms by eating a banana, which regulates blood sugar and produces stress-relieving relaxation.
- Bananas reduce swelling, protect against type II diabetes, aid weight loss, strengthen the nervous system, and help with the production of white blood cells, all due to high levels of vitamin B-6.
- Eating bananas will help prevent kidney cancer, protects the eyes against macular degeneration and builds strong bones by increasing calcium absorption.
- Bananas make you smarter and help with learning by making you more alert. Eat a banana before an exam to benefit from the high levels of potassium.
- Bananas are high in antioxidants, providing protection from free radicals and chronic disease.
- Eating a banana between meals helps stabilize blood sugar and reduce nausea from morning sickness.
- Control blood sugar and avoid binging between meals by eating a banana.
- Eating a banana can lower the body temperature and cool you during a fever or on a hot day.◆