

Know your fruit, The Banana

Surg R Adm Girish Gupta NM, VSM(Retd), DCH, DNB, DM, FNNF
Professor of Pediatrics, SGRR Medical College, Patel Nagar, Dehradun
Email: dscnnf@gmail.com



Banana is one of the most consumed fruit by human race globally since the time immemorial. Our old saints have been recommending & possibly living on bananas along with some other fruits & milk. However, still we may not be fully knowing about the contents & health benefits of this great super-fruit. This article is an humble attempt to make us aware about contents & health benefits of banana. This article is based on published facts.

Nutritional Contents

One medium banana (about 126 grams) is considered to be one serving. One serving of banana contains the following nutrients:

▪ Calories	▪ 110
▪ Carbohydrate	▪ 30 gms
▪ Proteins	▪ 1 gm
▪ Potassium	▪ 450 mgs
▪ Magnesium	▪ 34 mgs
▪ Vitamin B6	▪ 0.5 mgs
▪ Vitamin C	▪ 9 mgs
▪ Vitamin A	▪ 81 IU
▪ Fibre	▪ 3 gms
▪ Others	▪

Bananas are very good source of vitamin B6 , Manganese, Vitamin C, Potassium, Fiber, Biotin, and Copper. Bananas are naturally free of fat, **cholesterol** and sodium. Consequently, this super-fruit has many health benefits with some listed as under.

Cardiovascular Health

A cardiovascular benefit from bananas is related to their **potassium** content. Bananas are a good source of potassium, an essential mineral for maintaining normal blood pressure and heart function. Since one medium-sized banana contains a whopping 400 mgs of potassium, the inclusion of bananas in your routine meal plan may help to **prevent high blood pressure, atherosclerosis and stroke**. A second type of cardiovascular benefit from bananas involves their **sterol** content. While bananas are a very low-fat food , one type of fat that they do contain in small amounts are sterols like sitosterol, campesterol, and stigmasterol. As these sterols look structurally similar to cholesterol, they can block the absorption of dietary cholesterol. By blocking absorption, they help us keep our **blood cholesterol levels in check**. A third type of cardiovascular benefit from bananas involves their **fiber content**. At about 3 grams per medium banana, it is a good source of fiber. Approximately one-third of the fiber in bananas is **water-soluble fiber**. For one medium-sized banana, this amount translates into 1 gram of soluble fiber per banana. Soluble fiber in food is a type of fiber especially associated with **decreased risk of heart disease**, making regular intake of bananas a potentially helpful approach to lowering your heart disease risk.

Digestive Benefits

Bananas are a fascinating fruit in terms of their carbohydrate and sugar content. Even though

bananas are a fruit that tastes quite sweet when ripe, containing 14-15 grams of total sugar; bananas receive a rating of low in their glycemic index (GI) value. GI measures the impact of a food on our blood sugar. This low GI value for bananas is most likely related to two of their carbohydrate-related qualities. First, as mentioned previously, a medium-size banana contains about 3 grams of total fiber. Fiber is a nutrient that helps regulate the speed of digestion, and by keeping digestion well-regulated, conversion of carbohydrates to simple sugars and release of simple sugars from digesting foods also stays well-regulated. Within their total fiber content, bananas also contain **Pectins**. Pectins are unique and complicated types of fiber. Some of the components in pectins are water-soluble, and others are not. As bananas ripen, their water-soluble pectins increase, and this increase is one of the key reasons why bananas become softer in texture as they ripen. As their water-soluble pectins increase, so does their relative concentration of fructose in comparison to other sugars. This **increase in water-soluble pectins and higher proportional fructose content helps normalize the rate of carbohydrate digestion and moderates the impact of banana consumption on our blood sugar**. The bottom lines here are some surprisingly digestion-friendly consequences for a fruit that might be casually dismissed as being too high in sugar to be digestion-friendly. Similar to the importance of their water-soluble pectins is the digestive importance of **fructo-oligosaccharides** (FOS) in bananas. FOS are unique fructose-containing carbohydrates that are typically not broken down by enzymes in our digestive tract. Instead, they move along through the digestive tract until they reach our lower intestine and get metabolized by bacteria. This process helps **maintain the balance of "friendly" bacteria** (for example, *Bifidobacteria*) in our lower intestine, and as a consequence, it also supports our overall digestive health. Banana, therefore, on one side prevent & treat **constipation** by having high fibre content & on the other hand it is a good food **indiarrrhea management** because of pectin , a stool binder & **fructo-oligosaccharides, the probiotics**. There is reported improvement in Metabolic syndrome & fasting blood sugars on regular consumption of banana over few months.

Athletic performance

The unique mix of vitamins, minerals, and low glycemic carbohydrates in bananas has made them a favorite fruit among endurance athletes. Their easy portability, low expense, and great taste also help support their popularity. Bananas have long been valued by athletes for **prevention of muscle cramps**. Since bananas are a good source of potassium, and since low potassium levels are known to contribute to risk of muscle cramps. In a recent study, consumption of one or two bananas prior to an hour of exercise was shown to keep blood potassium levels higher after the training and may be reduce the incidence of muscle cramps.

Miscellaneous health benefits

Banana consumption also helps in asthma, vision quality, reduction in cancer and delayed aging amongst many others.

How to select & store

Bananas are picked off the tree while they're still green. Bananas should be firm, but not too hard, bright in appearance, and free from bruises or other injuries. Their stems and tips should be intact. Unripe bananas should not be placed in the refrigerator as this will interrupt the ripening process to such an extent that it will not be able to resume even if the bananas are returned to room temperature. If you need to hasten the ripening process, you can place bananas in a paper bag or wrap them in newspaper. Ripe bananas that will not be consumed for a few days can be placed in the refrigerator. While their peel may darken, the flesh will not be affected. For maximum flavor when consuming refrigerated bananas, remove them from the refrigerator and allow them to come back to room temperature. For the most antioxidants availability, eat fully ripened fruit. Bananas abound in hundreds of edible varieties that fall under

two distinct species: the sweet banana and the plantain banana. While we are accustomed to thinking of sweet bananas as having yellow skins, they can also feature red, pink, purple and black tones when ripe. Their flavor and texture range with some varieties being sweet while others have starchier characteristics. Plantain bananas may be cooked and considered more like a vegetable due to their starchier qualities; they have a higher **beta-carotene (Vitamin A)** concentration than most sweet bananas. **Pressure Cooking** of banana may enhance the antioxidant activity due to the release of bound phenolics from cell wall and oxidation and polymerisation of compounds present in it.

Banana peels are said to contain vitamin A, which helps in building immunity and fight against infections. They also contain a substance called lutein, which keeps the eyes healthy and prevents cataract. Banana peels have a lot of antioxidants and most of the B vitamins but majorly vitamin B6. They have soluble and insoluble fibers which slow down the process of digestion and lower cholesterol in the body. It is highly recommended to eat these peels because it has potassium and magnesium, which keeps a check on the blood pressure levels.

Conclusion

Banana is a super-fruit, use it optimally & thus remain healthy & away from doctors. Hope Banana gets more respect amongst the fruits in the basket.