Can Diabetics Eat Bananas?

by AFRA WILLMORE

Are Bananas Good for Diabetics?

There are a lot of misconceptions about living with diabetes. You may have heard that people with diabetes can't eat cake, sweets, grapes, mangoes or bananas.

While it's true that if that's all you ate your blood glucose levels would be sky high, it's not true that they are all banned substances. The key to a healthy diabetic diet is to understand you can eat anything in moderation and that is true for anyone, with or without diabetes.

Fruits are far from being unhealthy and can be a very healthy part of your diet – although those with diabetes should take care not to overindulge as fruit contains natural sugar. Levels vary between fruits which is where the myth about particular fruits started.

Can I Eat Bananas If I Have Diabetes?

The short answer is yes. Just don't go all ape and eat a bunch every day. Stick to one small banana as a snack or dessert.

100 grams of peeled banana contains about 90 calories and contains a good amount of fiber, anti-oxidants, minerals, and vitamins.

Yes, they are high in sugar compared to many other fruits, but they are also well known for being a fabulous food for filling you up for longer. The reason for this is that fiber content- a whopping seven percent of your Daily Recommended Amount (DRA) per 100 grams.

Got an issue with constipation? That soluble dietary fiber can help encourage regular bowel movements; thereby reducing constipation problems.

Of course, bananas are famous for the high levels of potassium they contain – 100g of banana flesh contains 358mg potassium which is around 8% of your RDA.

Potassium is an important component of cell and body fluids that helps control heart rate and blood pressure, countering the harmful effects of sodium.

Levels of potassium can drop dangerously low if you take certain drugs for high blood pressure (common in those with diabetes) or if you use insulin and don't have your blood glucose under control. However, too much potassium can be harmful, especially in those with diabetes so don't over-do potassium-rich foods.

The Research on Bananas and Diabetes

Research conducted by Dr. Shin-ichi Araki, at the Shiga University of Medical Science in Japan, explored the relationship between dietary potassium and negative health consequences in diabetic patients.

Dr. Araki's research, published in the *Clinical Journal of the American Society of Nephrology*, claimed that diets rich in potassium might help protect the heart and kidney health of patients with type 2 diabetes.

The trial carried out between 1996 and 2003 involved 623 Japanese type 2 diabetics, none of whom were currently using diuretic medicines or had any history of Cardiovascular Disease (CVD).

This long-term study measured potassium and sodium excretion through urine sampling.

The results showed that higher levels of potassium in urine indicated a lower risk of renal dysfunction and cardiovascular problems. Sodium excretion, on the other hand, showed no correlation.

Dr. Araki warned that a low-calorie, low-sodium diet may be good for diabetics generally but may also be deficient in potassium. He added that raising potassium levels in diabetes diet plans might prevent kidney failure and CVD from developing, or at least slow its advance.

What About Plantain?

Plantains are often called cooking bananas and are usually cooked and eaten when green or black. They are starchier and have less sugar than green/yellow dessert bananas.

The vegetable is popular in African, Asian, and Indian kitchens and are also used widely in the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico.

Plantains have similar nutritional value and health benefits to bananas but can’t be eaten raw and are often fried or even deep fried which is okay as a treat but day to day is not a healthy form of cooking.

Choose to boil, grill, bake or steam them instead. Add spices like cinnamon and nutmeg, oregano, garlic and turmeric instead of salt for a heart-healthy meal.

Be aware that one cup of plantain is the carbohydrate equivalent of two and a half slices of bread. Too many carbs will cause blood sugars to spike so if you include plantain in your meal maybe cut down or even cut out other starches like rice or beans. As a rule of thumb, no meal should be made up of more than ¼ carbs.

Diabetes and Dried Bananas

It can be useful for people with diabetes to carry healthy snacks around with them. They can help avoid unexpected dips in sugar if you get stuck in transit delays or in an area where there are no healthy options.

We’ve all been tempted by that mall muffin with sugary frosting when hunger pangs strike but it’s much more sensible to stop and snack on something you’ve prepared at home.

Unsalted nuts, crackers, and dried fruit are all great snacks. You can buy family size packs and split into individual bags or re-useable boxes to ensure cost efficiency and maintain portion control.

However, dried fruit, including dried bananas, should be consumed in small amounts as the drying process can concentrate the sugar content.

Bananas, Diabetes, and You

In conclusion, bananas can be a useful and tasty treat even for those with diabetes. They come pre-packaged in a useful biodegradable packaging (the skin) and can be baked as they are or into a cake or loaf to add natural sweetness.

Although some people might tell you they are too sweet for people with diabetes, bear in mind that even a large banana with around 114 calories, 27.8 carbs, and 25.1g sugar is better for you than a standard candy bar with 27.9 carbohydrate, 27.8 sugar, and a staggering 260 calories.