

# Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

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## “Fruits and Veggies Can Be a Double-edge Sword”

Investigators are now telling us that fruits and vegetables do not dramatically lower the risk of common diseases, including cancer. But, public health guidelines for food oriented toward high vegetable and fruit consumption has been around for decades and has continued up to the present. This scenario led to the rising popularity of vitamin supplements from the 1980s until today, but there have been huge problems with these trends. Research has failed to substantiate the suggestion that as many as 50% of cancers could be prevented by boosting the public’s consumption of fruit and vegetables. It's better to eat any fruit or vegetable than a plate of chicken wings or a big bag of Fritos. However, when you do eat fruits and veggies, be aware what's in them—some have better nutrients than others. And some fruits are loaded with sugar. Bananas are a tasty and convenient snack and they even come in their own easy-to-peel wrapper. They're also rich in fiber and nutrients like potassium, vitamin B6, and vitamin C. Bananas are low in fats and protein, and only contain about 105 calories. But because more than 90% of these calories come from carbohydrates, people looking to reduce sugars may want to think twice about it. It's hard to imagine a summer barbecue without fresh, sweet corn on the cob. But even the name—sweet corn—indicates this vegetable contains a good deal of sugar. (Wait—*is* corn a vegetable? Or is it a grain, or a fruit? Turns out, corn is all three.) Corn a good source of dietary fiber, vitamin C, pantothenic acid, and manganese, as well as lutein and zeaxanthin, two carotenoids. Now let’s consider watermelon. Although it does contain a healthy dose of vitamin C as well as proportionately more heart-healthy lycopene than a raw tomato. But how good is watermelon for your health? True, watermelon contains water. In fact, nearly 92% of watermelon is H<sub>2</sub>O. A refreshing slice of watermelon won't cause a sugar crash, but it won't juice you up with nutrients either. Mangoes are a common component for sweetening smoothies, sushi rolls, and guacamole. As a mango ripens, its glycemic index rises. On the upside, mangos are a good source of certain vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. In fact, one mango will supply you with your daily requirement of vitamin C. Mangoes are also high in vitamin A, folate, and potassium. Potatoes, like corn, are a starchy vegetable that the Harvard School of Public Health researchers found to be linked to weight gain.

In the America that I love, we realize the worst thing about potatoes is not the potatoes themselves, but the butter, salt, and deep-fry oil that we add to them.

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