

# Spuds have many useful facets

Potatoes are one the world's most popular foods. Agriculturists in 17th-century Europe found potatoes were easier to grow and sustain than many other crops and, when coupled with their nutritional value, potatoes gained popularity, particularly among the working class in Ireland.

Potatoes may be indelibly linked to Irish culture because of the widespread potato famine that forced many people to emigrate from Ireland. But there is more to the modest potato than many people may know.

## Potato history

Potatoes are an important addition to any diet, as they are a starchy root food that contains plenty of carbohydrates, which makes them closer to grains than other vegetables. Potatoes were first

cultivated by the Incas in Peru around 8,000 BC. The word "potato" comes from the Spanish *patata*. When Spanish conquistadors traveled to Peru, they discovered potatoes and brought them back to Europe.

Potatoes did not reach North America until 1621, when the governor of Bermuda included potatoes in a care package sent to Gov. Wyatt of Virginia in Jamestown. By the 1700s, permanent potato patches had been established.

## Nutritional value

Potatoes were once consumed in abundance on ships during long voyages because they are high in vitamin C and can prevent scurvy. Potatoes also have more potassium than bananas, offering 18 percent of the recommended daily value per serving. One medium-size potato is free of

cholesterol, sodium, and fat and comes in at about 110 calories, making them a healthy addition to any diet.

## Miscellaneous facts

While there are thousands of varieties of potatoes, most of them are not commercially produced. Potatoes have been served hot, cold, sliced, pickled, and even as a dessert. Benjamin Franklin once attended a banquet where the food was nothing but potatoes served in 20 different ways.

Potato chips and French fries are favorite snack foods. Thomas Jefferson is credited for introducing Americans to French fries. The popularity of fries has skyrocketed, and millions are consumed each and every year.

Some believe that potatoes are an aphrodisiac, while others feel they have medicinal properties, including curing



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warts. The Incas used to place slices of potatoes on broken bones to promote healing. Some people believe you can ease a sore throat and alleviate aches and pains with potatoes.

Potatoes have been enjoyed for thousands of years and provide a wealth of nutrition. While potatoes may be most associated with the Irish, these beloved starchy plants are truly a worldwide crop.

# Past 50? It's Time to Get a Colonoscopy – Don't Put Your Health At Risk

BY FRANCIS STEINHEBER, MD

March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, a reminder to all New Yorkers that the risk of colon cancer can be greatly reduced by getting a colonoscopy. In New York City, according to the New York Citywide Colon Cancer Control Coalition (C5), which includes the New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC), colorectal cancer is the second deadliest cancer, killing approximately 1,400 people each year, and 50,000 people nationally.

As a gastroenterologist practicing at HHC Coney Island Hospital, I've seen a promising trend in colon cancer awareness, diagnosis, and treatment – but we must push to do better. Colon cancer is not the death sentence it once was, and survival rates have improved dramatically, but

early detection is vital.

Ninety percent of colorectal cancers are curable when caught in the early stages. That is why I strongly urge all New Yorkers 50 and older to get a colonoscopy once every 10 years. Patients with a family history of colorectal cancer should discuss with their physician whether they should be screened earlier.

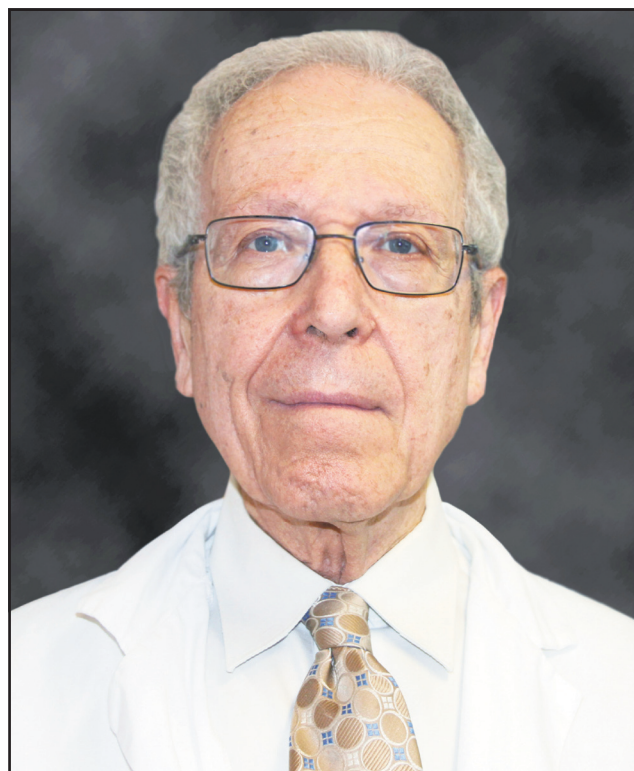
People with colon cancer often have no symptoms until the disease has reached advanced stages, and by the time people experience symptoms, treatment can be difficult or ineffective. Signs of colon cancer may include:

- A change in bowel habits, including diarrhea, constipation or a change in consistency of stool
- Rectal bleeding or blood in stool
- Persistent abdominal dis-

comfort, such as cramps, gas or pain

- A feeling that the bowel does not completely empty after a bowel movement
- Weakness or fatigue
- Unexplained weight loss

As a physician serving a diverse population of patients, it's important that I point out two additional facts about colon cancer: African Americans have higher rates of colon cancer and mortality than any other racial group, while Latinos tend to be diagnosed in later stages of the disease than others. While these points are alarming, we are seeing more colon cancer awareness in Brooklyn and patients are generally being diagnosed earlier and earlier, which is great news. Just last year, HHC hospitals in Brooklyn performed more than 7,500 colonoscopies.



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If you are at the recommended age for a colonoscopy or have family history of colorectal cancer, I urge you to reduce your risk of colon cancer and schedule your

colonoscopy.

*Affordable colonoscopies are available at all 11 NYC public hospitals. Visit [www.nyc.gov/hhc](http://www.nyc.gov/hhc) or call 311 to locate an HHC facility near you.*

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