
"Wash yuh pot, tun dem dung, it's mango time!"

There are many varieties of mangoes in Jamaica, including the affordable 'common' mangoes to the 'gold'-priced Julie (St Julian) and East Indian. The questions are often asked, "Are mangoes good for you?" "Will they cause diabetes?" "Aren't they fattening?"

To answer these questions, let's put the mango story in perspective. Mango is a fruit and fruits should form a part of a healthy diet. Healthy individuals are advised to have more than five servings of fruits and vegetables each day. There are specific disease states where types and amounts of fruits may need monitoring.

One mango, about the size of a medium St Julian, has enough calories as a slice of hard dough bread and enough sugar as two tablespoons of honey. There is absolutely no need to avoid mangoes if you are watching your weight or if you are diabetic. You however, need to watch the amount or portions you consume at any one time.

Powerful antioxidant

Mangoes are a powerhouse of nutrients and disease-fighting chemicals. They contain beta carotene, which is a powerful antioxidant with many health benefits. Beta carotene can be changed to vitamin A in the body and it is converted based on your body's need. So, during mango season when many people, especially children, are consuming a lot of mangoes, there is no risk of vitamin A toxicity, as the amount of beta carotene converted to vitamin A is reduced when there is excess.

Beta carotene plays a role in slowing the development of atherosclerosis by preventing the oxidation of 'bad' cholesterol. Because of the antioxidant properties of beta carotene, it is believed to play a role in cancer prevention. The fibre content of mango is also beneficial as it is high in the soluble fibre, pectin, which plays a positive role in lowering 'bad' cholesterol.

This is a time to eliminate other types of sweet pleasures from the diet and concentrate on the mangoes in moderation, especially if you are watching calories, carbohydrates or sugars. For the others, have fun in mango heaven!

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