

As one man survives — and thrives — on them for two months.

How long can you live on nothing but spuds?



UNLIKE many animals which live happily on, say, just grass or dead antelope, we humans are unfussy omnivores. Not only can we gobble down just about anything that grows or breathes, our bodies thrive on a huge variety of foods. Indeed, if there is one constant that shines

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through the decades of shifting fads and fashions of nutritional advice, it is to 'eat a varied diet'. So the news that a man has managed not only to survive, but to flourish, on a diet consisting

entirely of the humble potato — for two whole months — seems rather surprising.

The self-proclaimed 'Potato Man', aka Chris Voigt, director of the Washington State Potato Commission in America, is a glowing testament to the benefits of the starchy, vitamin-rich tuber. Since the start of October, potato evangelist Mr Voigt claims to have eaten 20 a day, cooked in a variety of ways but, save the addition of a little salt or a dribble of cooking oil, nothing else. Such was his dedication, that on Thanksgiving Day he ate only mashed potato in the shape of a turkey.

After consuming some 1,200 spuds, the Potato Man says he has rarely felt better, losing more than a stone and seeing his blood-sugar and cholesterol drop to healthier levels.

Most surprisingly, the monotonous diet has not even put him off his favourite food — although, given his job, perhaps you'd expect him to say that. He says he still loves potatoes and will continue to eat them, except from now on 'with something else'.

So has Mr Voigt found the answer to one of the big mysteries of human biology, namely: is there a single foodstuff that humans can live on indefinitely without becoming unhealthy?

In short, the answer is 'no'. But few foods can beat the potato when it comes to all-round goodness.

Native to the dry slopes of the Andes, the *Solanum tuberosum*, a herbaceous perennial closely related to deadly nightshade and the tomato, was cultivated for millennia by the Incas and other peoples of South America. Since it was brought to Europe in 1536 by Spanish explorers, the potato has spread far and wide from its remote

were exhorted to scrub rather than pee their spuds — advice given by nutritionists to this day.

So, how healthy is the potato? And how much longer could Mr Voigt have lasted on his diet? According to Heler Bond, of the British Dietetic Association, you certainly couldn't live on potatoes for ever. 'Starchy foods like potatoes should make up about a third of what we eat. But potatoes are missing some vital nutrients,' she says.

What they do contain is starch (a good source of 'slow-burn' calories) and very useful amounts of vitamins B and C. In the 19th century, British and Spanish sailors ate them to ward off scurvy. Although not as rich a source of vitamin C as lemons or limes, potatoes were cheaper. To this day Britons get a third of their vitamin C from potatoes simply because we eat so many.

The average 5oz potato — which should cost around 10p — contains about 115 calories, and Mr Voigt's 20-a-day diet would have provided him with all his energy needs, nine times the recommended daily amount of vitamin C and more than adequate potassium, fibre, manganese, phosphorus, iron and folate (vitamin B9), which is essential for DNA to function properly.