

BANANAS— Nutritional Powerhouses!

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Bananas, one of the world’s favorite fruits, boast a rich history and an impressive nutritional profile. Originating in Southeast Asia over 8,000 years ago, bananas spread globally through trade and colonization, with the Cavendish variety dominating modern markets. Alexander the Great discovered them in 327 BCE. They became popular in the U.S. in the late 1800s, touted as a healthy, affordable “super-food.”

Bananas quickly became embedded in American food culture. Their soft texture made them ideal for infant food, and their natural sweetness lent itself to desserts like banana cream pie and banana splits, which emerged in the early 1900s. During the Great Depression, bananas were one of the few affordable fruits, further cementing their place in American kitchens.

By mid-century, bananas were a lunchbox staple, paired with peanut butter in sandwiches or sliced over cereal. Their versatility extended to processed foods—banana-flavored puddings, candies, and even baby food became commonplace. Bananas are now the most consumed fruit in the U.S., with the average American eating about 27 pounds annually. Their convenience—pre-packaged, easy to peel—aligns with fast-paced lifestyles.

Beyond their convenience and sweetness, bananas are highly nutritious, serving as a staple, nutrient-dense, and portable food source. They are rich in potassium, vitamin B6, vitamin C, fiber, and antioxidants like gallic acid, particularly concentrated in the peel. Their resistant starch content—higher in unripe (green) bananas—acts as a prebiotic, nourishing gut bacteria and improving digestive health.

NUTRITIONAL BENEFITS OF BANANAS

- The potassium content is essential for heart health and blood pressure, with one medium banana providing 12% of the recommended daily intake, and they help manage blood pressure and reduce the risk of stroke.
- For digestive support and as part of the BRAT diet (Bananas, Rice, Applesauce, Toast), they are easy to digest and help replenish lost electrolytes during or after illness.



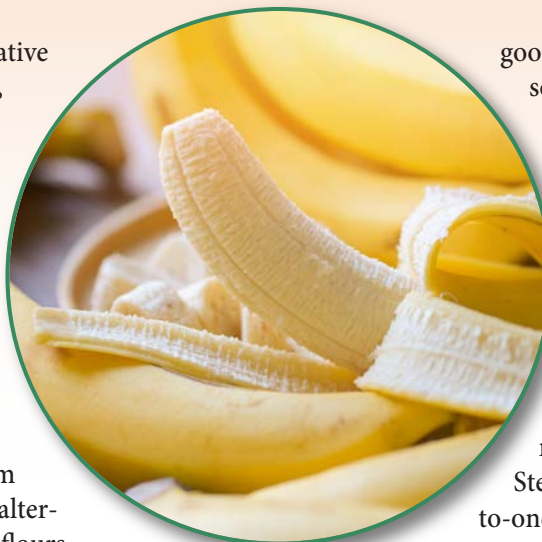
- For energy, bananas are great sources of carbohydrates.
- For bone health, the potassium acts as an alkalizing agent that can help prevent the loss of calcium from bones.
- Bananas are naturally fat-free.
- Have long been considered a natural remedy for muscle cramps.

A medium banana provides 105 calories, 27g carbohydrates (including 14g natural sugars), 3g fiber, and 422 mg potassium (12% DV), alongside vitamins C and B6. Ripeness Matters: Unripe (green) bananas are higher in resistant starch and better for blood sugar control, whereas very ripe bananas have higher sugar levels but are easier-to-digest starches that offer a quick energy boost.

BANANA BREAD— *The Ultimate Comfort Food*

Banana Bread is a personal favorite of mine. Its origins intertwine with resourcefulness—by using overripe bananas and avoiding waste. Modern dietary needs demand alternatives for gluten-free and sugar-free lifestyles.

A quick word about alternative flours: not all are created equal, and you could sabotage your baking using the wrong one. Bob's Red Mill has lots of choices. This recipe works best with his 1 to 1 baking flour or his Grain-free Paleo flour. Another great option is Namaste organic & gluten free flour. These flours include starches (organic tapioca or arrowroot) and gums (guar gum or Xanthan), which make the "alternative flour" equal to standard flours—



good to know if you are trying to convert some of your old recipes to be healthier. (I learned the hard way!)

About sugar substitutes: This recipe works well with most dry sweeteners. The key is to be sure that they measure one for one with regular sugar. The packaging should tell you. There are monk fruit products on the market that are concentrated, whereas you would never use $\frac{3}{4}$ of a cup in any recipe. Stevia has a product that measures one-to-one that has been successful for me. ■

BANANA BREAD—REINVENTED

Gluten Free & Sugar Free

INGREDIENTS:

- **NUTS:** $\frac{3}{4}$ cup walnuts
- **DRY INGREDIENTS:**
 - 2 cups of flour
 - 2 teaspoons baking soda
 - $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon baking powder
 - 1 teaspoon Ceylon cinnamon
 - $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon sea salt
- **WET INGREDIENTS:**
 - $\frac{1}{2}$ cup oil (avocado, olive or melted coconut oil)
 - $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sweetener, such as monk fruit or stevia (to replace refined sugars)
 - 3 eggs
 - $2\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoons vanilla
 - $\frac{3}{4}$ cup mashed bananas

INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1) Preheat the oven to 350°.
- 2) Lightly spray two 4 x 8 loaf pans.



3) Toast walnuts at 350° in oven for 8 minutes stirring occasionally.

4) Allow nuts to cool then coarsely chop them.

5) Sift dry ingredients

6) With a mixer, combine wet ingredients. Add eggs one at a time, beating well after each egg. Stir in the vanilla and mashed bananas. On low speed, begin to add the dry ingredients and finally, the toasted nuts. Only mix until blended—you don't want to over beat. Pour batter into pans.

7) Bake on the middle oven shelf at 350° for 45 to 60 minutes until a toothpick inserted comes out clean.

8) Cool the loaves slightly before removing from pans onto a wire rack.

- **PROTEIN BOOST:** Add hemp seeds (30% protein and omega-3s).

- **SWEETER TWIST:** Add dried cherries or raisins for natural sweetness.

BANANA BREAD—when reinvented with gluten-free flours and natural sweeteners—becomes a guilt-free comfort food! ■