Can Eating Bananas Help Control Atrial Fibrillation?

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What's the Connection Between Bananas and AFib?

Atrial fibrillation (AF) is an atypical heart rhythm affecting over 6 million individuals worldwide. AF is the most common of one of the arrhythmias that involve the heart's two upper chambers called the atria.

Essentially, it is a disturbance in the heart's electrical conduction system that causes the atria to contract in a very chaotic and often fast pattern. Additionally, not all the electrical signals initiated by the atria pass to the lower chambers, known as the ventricles. The incomplete transmission causes the two sections of the heart to lose their synchronous connection.

AF is sometimes genetic or can result from certain heart disease types, other chronic conditions, or emotional stress. AF is also not restricted by gender or race. In this article we are going to take a look at the connection between bananas and AFib to see if you should be adding this fruit into your diet to manage symptoms.

What Are the Symptoms of AF?

AF has a variety of symptoms that can vary from person to person. Some of the more common symptoms are:

- Chest pain or a pounding sensation that is generally not as severe as a heart attack
- Throat discomfort
- Dizziness
- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath
- Weakness
- Fast, irregular heart rate
- Decreased ability to exercise
- Confusion
- Sweating

Your age, the cause of your AF, and your symptom severity can all impact your heart's pumping ability.

How Diet Influences AF

When you have AF, there are certain foods that you want to avoid, such as those with high levels of sodium and caffeine; these can raise your blood pressure, which can trigger an AF episode. You will also want to cut out alcohol consumption as much as possible, which will help as well.

One of the better diets for people with AF is the Mediterranean diet. This plan focuses on plant-based foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables, nuts and seeds, and whole grains. Poultry and fish are the primary protein sources, with red meat limited to small quantities.

Other diet plans that your physician and dietitian can recommend are the Dash diet, paleo diet, and gluten-free diet. The common theme with all four of these plans is that they limit your intake of processed foods, added sugars, saturated fat and trans-fat, baked goods, caffeine, and alcohol.

Eating Fresh Fruits and Vegetables to Manage AF

If you have AF, eating fresh fruits and vegetables every day is one step you can take to manage the condition. There are several fruits and vegetables that are beneficial for AF:

- Bananas
- Blueberries
- Strawberries
- Raspberries
- Avocados
- Sweet potatoes
- Oranges
- Apricots
- Dates
- Beets
- Tomatoes
- Squash
- Watermelon
- White and black beans
- Edamame
- Pomegranate

The Value of Potassium

These foods all share a common characteristic: they are all excellent sources of potassium. Potassium is a crucial ion needed to help correctly regulate the heart's electrical conduction system.

Individuals with low potassium levels are at a higher risk of developing high blood pressure, which can lead to a stroke. Some research has shown that not having enough potassium can also lead to an increased risk of AF.

Some people with AF take diuretics or "water pills" if they have other chronic conditions like high blood pressure or heart failure. Some of these diuretics are not "potassium-sparing," which means that besides helping your body get rid of excess water, they also cause you to lose valuable potassium.

Bananas and AFib

Fresh bananas are a very nutritious whole food and are part of a heart-healthy diet. As mentioned above, bananas are one of the foods that help manage AF because of their high potassium content. Eating bananas can also help reduce your future risk of stroke

Regularly consuming a banana can increase your potassium levels, especially if you take a diuretic that is not potassium-sparing or have low potassium levels because of another chronic condition. One medium banana contains approximately 422 milligrams of potassium, and 4,700 milligrams per day is an adequate intake for healthy adults. When purchasing bananas, make sure to pick those that have not passed the right stage.

Why You Should Avoid Overripe Bananas

A British publication, The Daily Mail, ran a story in July 2013 claiming that overripe bananas could trigger AF.

The article states bananas that ferment has high tyramine concentrations, a naturally occurring chemical that has

stimulant type effects on the heart. A research study printed in the British Medical Journal in 1987 discussed how foods containing tyramine could generate an AF episode substantiates this claim.

Talk to Your Doctor

If you want to add bananas to your current diet or increase your current intake, check with your physician first. Your family physician or specialist can order lab tests to measure your current potassium level to see if you are deficient.

You do not want to increase your consumption of potassium-rich foods on your own if your levels are within the normal range. Consuming more potassium than your body needs can cause a condition called hyperkalemia. Hyperkalemia is a dangerous situation and requires immediate medical treatment. Untreated hyperkalemia can trigger deadly cardiac arrhythmias.

If you are low in potassium, you can also consult a registered dietitian to determine the appropriate serving size for bananas and other potassium-rich foods that will help increase your levels to get them back to the recommended range.