

Healthy Nuts: Health Benefits for Almonds, Walnuts, Cashews, Peanuts and More

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The fatty, salty, creamy, savory taste and texture of nuts make them a popular snack, accompaniment with beer and ingredient in a host of dishes. But given their high calorie and fat contents, many people still shy away from eating nuts regularly.



Now, a new report published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found that adults who incorporate nuts into their diets don't have to limit their consumption. **A review of 31 studies about eating nuts found that people who added nuts to their diets and who replaced other foods with nuts lost more weight (an average 1.4 pounds more) and reduced their waist sizes by more than half an inch.**

"Although the magnitude of these effects was modest, the results allay the fear that nut consumption may promote obesity," wrote the researchers, according to Reuters Health. "Our findings support the inclusion of nuts in healthy diets for cardiovascular prevention."

But weight loss isn't the only benefit found in almonds, walnuts, cashews and the like. Here are a few other health reasons to chow down on the snack:

Stress Reduction

Of course nuts can't make your deadline or huge credit card bill go away, but the nutrients in several types of nuts can help protect your body against the damaging physical effects of being stressed out. One study looked at nuts rich in alpha-linolenic acid, like walnuts, and found that they had a heart-protective benefit during times of acute stress -- which are known to cause cardiovascular strain.

And almonds, thanks to high vitamin E, vitamin B and magnesium content can bolster your immune system when you're stressed, reported Women's Health.

Heart Health

Nuts, like almonds, hazel nuts, peanuts, Brazil nuts, walnuts and cashews can all play a role in reducing the risk of heart disease, according to a Harvard review. That's because nuts may help reduce LDL cholesterol (more on that later), and incorporate a dose of heart-healthy monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fat and fiber, which has a heart-protective effect. Nuts are also rich in arginine, an amino acid that converts to nitric oxide in the body and helps blood vessels to relax.

Lung Cancer

A diet rich in pistachios may provide some protection from lung cancer, according to preliminary research presented at the American Association for Cancer Research Frontiers in Cancer Prevention Research Conference. The researchers theorize that the nut's richness in gamma-tocopherol, a type of vitamin E, may be the key to cancer protection, although further research is required.

Weight Maintenance

The 2013 review of nut health benefits found a modest improvement in overall weight, but several studies have found that nuts can play a role in weight maintenance. That's because nuts are satisfying -- a "high satiety" food -- that is metabolized slowly by the body, thanks to high fiber counts. In other words? **Snackers are more satisfied after eating nuts than after eating foods of comparable caloric value, but less nutrient density.**

Cholesterol

A walnut a day may keep bad cholesterol away, according to a 2010 study in the Archives of Internal Medicine that found a 7.4 percent reduction in "bad" LDL cholesterol and an 8.3 percent reduction in the ratio of LDL to HDL, reported WebMD. What's more, triglyceride concentrations declined by more than 10 percent.

Prostate Cancer

Brazil nuts, which are high in the mineral selenium, may provide some protection against advanced prostate cancer, according to preliminary research presented at the American Association of Cancer Research. The research was conducted on a Dutch cohort study and found that men with high levels of selenium, tested from toe nails, were 60 percent less likely develop advanced prostate cancer within 17 years.

Brain Health

Thanks to the healthy dose of vitamin E that nuts can deliver, they are considered a brain food -- helping to prevent cognitive decline that happens with age. Peanuts (even though they are legumes, we commonly group them with nuts), in particular, may be a good choice because they are high in the B-vitamin folate, which improves neural health, reducing risk of cognitive decline.

Beyond protecting against age-associated problems, a British Journal of Nutrition study found that walnuts may improve working memory (not just reference memories), problem-solving and motor function -- at least in rats!

Men's Reproductive Health

For men looking to start a family, walnuts may have an effect on sperm quality, reported HuffPost Healthy Living's Amanda L. Chan. Eating about two handfuls of nuts, one UCLA study found, could improve the quality of sperm, in terms of its "vitality, motility, and morphology," the researchers reported.

What's more, pistachios may play a role in reducing erectile dysfunction, according to a study in the International Journal of Impotence Research.

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