

Nuts—the Delicious Path to Good Health

By Zel Allen

If you've always thought of nuts as simply tasty snack food, think again. While they certainly do satisfy as a snack, they offer so much more. Imagine each nut, whether an almond, walnut, pecan, hazelnut, or others, as a tiny powerhouse of amazing energy.

Packed with protein, nuts are a nutrient dense food source that can take center stage on the plate in the form of a nutburger, nutty soup, or nut-enhanced bean dish. A mere one and one-half-ounce serving of almonds delivers 9 grams of protein, while that quantity of walnuts provides 6 grams. And nuts are such an irresistible treat to the taste buds.

Everyone knows fiber is an important addition to the diet for its ability to lower cholesterol, prevent constipation, and provide satiety. Turn to nuts for their generous contribution of fiber. While all nuts offer an abundance of fiber, almonds and pistachios take top honors with five grams and 4.4 grams respectively for a one and one-half ounce serving. Most people would be eager to include dietary fiber in the form of nuts if they knew how healthful and beneficial they are.

To help lower the risk of heart attack, vitamin E comes to the rescue packed into every variety of nuts except the chestnut. The health-caring nut family offers other vitamin benefits in the form of thiamine, riboflavin, niacin, pyridoxine, and folate. But where they really sparkle is the host of important minerals they contain—calcium, magnesium, potassium, iron, zinc, selenium, copper, manganese, and phosphorous. All nuts offer calcium, but almonds deliver the biggest boost. Brazil nuts are noted for selenium, cashews for zinc, and peanuts are packed with potassium.

Walnuts have a special redeeming property that makes them stand apart from other nuts. They contain omega 3, an essential fatty acid that helps to decrease inflammation in the arteries. Lowering the inflammation reduces C-reactive protein, an indicator of heart disease. Walnuts also have a protective effect on the endothelium, the delicate lining of the arteries.

Recent health studies focusing on nut consumption have researchers turning out dizzying amounts of good news that nuts are really good for you. In addition to the familiar nutrients like vitamins and minerals, nuts contain good fats, mostly monounsaturated fats that help to lower cholesterol, especially LDL cholesterol frequently mentioned as the bad cholesterol.

Because nuts are high in monounsaturated fats, it's natural to think including nuts in the daily diet will cause weight gain. Surprising evidence shows that isn't the case. In a six-

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month study conducted at Loma Linda University, lead author Dr. Joan Sabaté concluded, "If people substitute walnuts for other calories, then eating walnuts will not lead to weight gain, and may lead to improvements in other indicators of health, such as a decrease in LDL cholesterol."

During that study, published in the *British Journal of Nutrition*, the group consuming nuts were asked to eat one to one and one-half ounces of walnuts every day. At the conclusion, the average weight gain was less than one pound.

How can you benefit from these research findings? Simply enjoy a handful a day of raw or dry roasted nuts. That's about one and one-half ounces or about one-fourth cup. Avoid those that have been salted or roasted in oil to keep blood pressure and weight in check. Add a sprinkle of nuts to your cereal, salad, soup, or even homemade salad dressings. Create a nutburger with ground nuts and cooked grains like brown rice or barley. Add some seasonings, form them into patties, and bake them about 15 to 25 minutes. Nuts also make a tasty and nutritious addition to fruit smoothies. Simply expressed, nuts are delicious! That's why it's so easy to reap their benefits.

References

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USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference
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