

Health Benefits of Nuts

Nuts are an excellent sources of protein, minerals, "good" monounsaturated fats, vitamin E, folate, fiber and naturally occurring cholesterol-lowering compounds called plant sterols. They are also quite low in "artery-clogging" saturated fats and therefore good for the heart.

Several studies have shown the benefits of nuts, including:

- Reduced risk of heart disease and sudden cardiac death
- Increased elasticity of the arteries and reduced levels of vascular cell adhesion molecules.
- Lower LDL cholesterol levels.
- Stimulate the production of serotonin in the brain, due to an amino acid, tryptophan, which can improve depression and promote relaxation.
- Help dilate blood vessels due to the presence of the amino acid arginine, which may help to lower elevated blood pressure levels.

While nuts are calorically dense and easy to overeat, they are also a satisfying snack. It has been suggested that people trying to lose weight who eat nuts tend to be more compliant with their diets because the fat and fiber content of nuts makes them very filling. An ounce of nuts is usually equal to about 170 to 180 calories. The best way to add nuts to your diet is to eat them instead of other foods, especially ones that contain heart-damaging fat.

- Top hot or cold cereal with nuts.
- Sprinkle almonds on top of yogurt.
- Add nuts to your salads.
- Use nuts to replace croutons in salads or soups.
- Sprinkle pine nuts on pasta.
- Add slivered almonds to chicken salad.
- Add nuts to quick breads such as pancakes, waffles, or muffins.
- Add a handful of nuts to steamed veggies.

All nuts have healthy benefits, but walnuts and almonds are particularly good:

Walnuts are a great source of omega-3 essential fatty acids, are heart-protective, promote better cognitive function and provide anti-inflammatory benefits. Walnuts also contain the antioxidant compound ellagic acid, known to fight cancer and support the immune system.

Almonds, one of the best nuts for lowering cholesterol, are rich in many nutrients including potassium, manganese, copper, vitamin E, selenium, magnesium, and calcium. One-fourth cup of almonds contains almost as much calcium as a ¼ cup of milk.

SOURCE: Frequent Nut Consumption And Risk Of Coronary Heart Disease In Women: Prospective Cohort Study, BMJ 1998. The Iowa Women's Health Study, N Engl J Med 1996. Concerning the Possibility of a Nut..., Arch Intern Med 1992. Nut Consumption and Decreased Risk of Sudden Cardiac Death in the Physicians' Health Study, Arch Intern Med 2002. A Walnut Diet Improves Endothelial Function in Hypercholesterolemic Subjects, Circulation 2004. Protective Effects of Walnut Extract Against Amyloid Beta Peptide-Induced Cell Death and Oxidative Stress in PC12 Cells, Phytochemistry 2003.