

The Wellness Family

Dr. Erin Keeps You Informed

The Nuts and Bolts of Nuts and Seeds

With time, research is revealing that nuts and seeds do not deserve their bad reputation. Absolutely, they are high in fat. But it's the good fat, not the bad, and when eaten in moderation, their health benefits far outweigh the dangers of their fat content. The fact is, the more we learn about nuts and seeds, the more we realize that they're one of our best snack food options.

Isn't Fat Bad?

We know that nuts and seeds are high in fat. An ounce of almonds and sunflower seeds both have 14 grams, cashews have 13 and pecans have a total fat count of 20 grams. It's when we consider what kind of fat they contain that we see the difference between these and other foods with a high total fat count.

Saturated fats are those that raise our bad cholesterol levels and increase our risk of heart disease and strokes. These are the fats that are high in most snack items and put our health at risk. An ounce of almonds contain 1 gram of saturated fats, and cashews and pecans have 3 and 2 grams respectively.

Where nuts and seeds are high in fat is in the mono and polyunsaturated fats, but these are good for us, raising our "good cholesterol" levels and typically containing essential vitamins like A, D, E and K.

The Facts

In 1996, the Iowa Women's Health Study found that women who ate nuts 4 or more times a week were 40% less likely to die of heart disease. Since then similar studies performed by the Harvard School of Public Health and Loma Linda University in California have found the same. The Physician's Health Study in 2002 found that men who consumed nuts 2 or more times per week had a reduced risk of sudden cardiac death.

A study at the University of Toronto found that nuts, almonds in particular, reduced risk factors that are typically associated with heart disease, specifically LDL count or bad cholesterol levels, and Richard Mattes, PhD, professor of foods and nutrition at Purdue University in Indiana found that when people added 1 to 2 ounces of nuts a day to their diets they did not gain weight, contrary to popular belief.

Studies performed at several North American universities revealed that three times as many people

trying to lose weight were able to stick to a diet that included moderate fat content in the form of nuts and seeds. They suggested that the fat, protein and fiber in nuts helped the dieter feel full longer, so many felt less deprived and ate less during the day.

Another study of women by the Harvard School of Public Health reported that there was a 30% reduced risk of type 2 diabetes in those women who ate 5 or more 1-ounce servings of nuts per week when compared with women who rarely or never ate nuts.

Finally, studies published in the Journal of Nutrition and Medline have found that seeds, and flax seed in particular, are high in omega-3, which have proven benefits in the fight against heart disease, stroke and other circulatory diseases.



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The Good and the Bad

When it comes to all foods, too much of a good thing can still end up being a bad thing, that's why moderation is key. But the options for eating good nuts and seeds are limitless, and the vitamins and minerals provided equally various.

A typical serving of nuts (1 ounce) generally will contain between 160 to 200 calories and 13 to 20 grams of fat, but it's monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats that make up the majority. When compared to potato chips, pastries and other typical "snack food" items with equal fat content, the difference lies in the nutritional value of the item as a whole.

Most nuts and seeds are rich in fiber, phytonutrients and antioxidants such as Vitamin E and selenium as well as sterols and omega-3.

Despite the fact that it is not one, the peanut is still referred to as the world's most widely consumed nut.

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Since it is actually a legume and a relative to lentils and garbanzo beans, it is a starch and not as nutritious as actual nuts. An additional concern is it's a very common food allergen. Generally this is the one "nut" to avoid.

Nutritional Value

Sunflower seeds provide the most potent combination of vitamins and minerals of any common nut or seed. A one-ounce serving, which is about 2 tablespoons of seeds, contains more than 30% of the daily value of six vitamins and minerals, including Vitamin E, phosphorous, selenium and manganese.

Pumpkin seeds are an equally healthful choice with ¼-cup of kernels boasting more than twice the omega-3s of a four-ounce serving of salmon. While the Flax seed has long been recognized as a very popular health food, the Chia seed is now being recognized for its merits. Both of these seeds are rich in essential fatty acids like omega-3 and 6.

Nuts are an excellent source of vitamins and minerals, with one ounce of Brazil nuts containing 780% of the recommended daily intake of selenium, and walnuts providing the most omega-3 fatty acids of any common nut. Almonds are a wonderful source of copper, magnesium and phosphorous, and 6 grams of protein per one-ounce serving. The June 2004 issue of the *Journal of Agriculture and Food Chemistry* reported that pecans contain the highest antioxidant capacity of all nuts.

How to Snack Healthy

Nuts and seeds are definitely one of nature's best snack foods and they can be enjoyed in a variety of ways; of course, the best way is always going to be a small handful a day. The typical serving of a nut or seed is going to be one-ounce or just enough to fill the

palm of your hand. Remember not to snack right out of the bag, as you may not realize how many you've eaten until you've eaten too many.

Nuts and seeds are a wonderful crunchy addition to a green salad. Sunflower seeds are common, but slivered almonds are equally good. They can also be added to steamed vegetables or an entrée.

Roasted nuts from a can are typically going to have additives that may counteract some of the good you're doing by choosing a healthy snack. So, if you prefer your nuts and seeds roasted, do it yourself. This can be done by spreading a single layer of nuts or seeds in a baking dish or sheet and then lightly coating them with olive oil. This will help the nuts or seeds brown while roasting. Put them in the oven for about 5 to 10 minutes. Do not leave them in the oven for too long as they do have a high fat content and will continue to cook for a bit after being removed from the oven.

Summary

The worst thing we can do is reach for junk foods when we need a snack. Nuts and seeds are a convenient but healthy snack food and have been proven to take the edge off our hunger without the added carbohydrates and sugar of most other snack food options.

Nuts are not a safe snack food for most children under 5 as they may represent a choking hazard. However, many grocery stores are beginning to stock almond, macadamia, pistachio, cashew and even sunflower seed butters, a healthy alternative to peanut butter.

Additionally, almond milk is now available as a great substitute for cow's milk. While cow's milk is high in saturated fat and a proven food allergen, almond milk is neither of these things. Typically sweetened using dates instead of sugar or sugar cane, almond milk is a healthier substitute than even soy milk.

Dear Patient,

Dr. Erin is dedicated to providing you with the absolute best in family wellness care. So take a moment today to discuss with your Family Wellness Chiropractor any concerns you may have regarding your family's overall health and wellness.

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