

The Benefit of Nuts and Seeds

Many recent studies have shown that eating nuts and seeds can help reduce the risk of heart disease. While they are high in calories and fat, the fat is considered heart healthy. Nuts and seeds are a healthy choice because they have:

- Low levels of saturated fats and no cholesterol.
- High levels of heart healthy monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats.
- Phytochemicals (phytoestrogens, phenolic compounds, flavonoids).
- Dietary fiber.
- Plant protein, which makes them a good alternative to meat.
- Vitamins E, B6, niacin, and folic acid.
- Minerals such as magnesium, zinc, iron, calcium, copper, selenium, and potassium.

Nuts and seeds can help lower LDL (bad) cholesterol when you eat them in place of saturated and trans fats. The nutrients in nuts and seeds also help keep your blood vessels healthy.

Even if you need to lose weight, you can still eat nuts and seeds instead of other high calorie foods. For example, 1 handful of nuts and/or seeds and a piece of fruit can provide a mid-afternoon snack that satisfies but is still lower in calories, sugars, and saturated fat than a candy bar.

Are all nuts good for you?

Most nuts contain mainly monounsaturated fats. This includes almonds, walnuts, pecans, cashews, Brazil nuts, chestnuts, hazelnuts, peanuts, and pistachios. Many nuts, especially walnuts, have anti-inflammatory omega-3 fatty acids. Omega-3's are a form of fatty acids that are good for

your heart. Other nuts, like almonds, are rich in the antioxidant vitamin E, provide the amount of calcium in ¼ cup of milk as well as 3 grams of dietary fiber and 6 grams of plant protein.

What about seeds?

Just like nuts, seeds are great sources of unsaturated fats and fiber. Some examples are pumpkin, sunflower, sesame, chia, and ground flax. Like walnuts, ground flaxseed contains high amounts of omega-3 fatty acids. Be sure to use ground flaxseed, sometimes called flax meal. Our digestive system is not able to breakdown whole flaxseeds.

What about nut and seed butters?

Nut and seed butters like peanut, almond and sunflower seed butter provide the same nutrients as their whole counterparts but in a more condensed form. For example, 1 ounce or 28 peanuts, 24 almonds, and 1/4 cup sunflower seeds has about 170 calories whereas 2 level tablespoons of nut and seed butter has about 200 calories. Choose natural peanut butter (oil separates at the top of the jar) to avoid the trans fat in many name brand peanut butters.

How often should I eat nuts and seeds? How much should I eat?

Nuts and seeds are easy to store and easy to eat on the go, but they are also easy to overeat. This is because they are calorie dense meaning they naturally have many calories in a small serving. A daily serving of nuts and seeds is equal to one ounce or 1/4 cup or two tablespoons of nut and seed butter. The chart on the next page gives information on calories, types of fat and fiber content per serving.

	#of kernels/oz	calories	total fat	MUF*	PUF*	SAT*	Fiber
Almonds	24	160	14	9	3	1	3
Brazils	6-8	190	19	7	7	5	2
Cashews	18	160	13	8	2	3	1
Hazelnuts	20	180	17	13	2	1.5	3
Peanuts	28	170	14	7	5	2	2
Pecans	10 (20 halves)	200	20	12	6	2	3
Pine nuts	150-157	160	14	5	6	2	2
Pistachios	49	160	13	7	4	1.5	3
Walnuts	7(14 halves)	190	18	2.5	13	1.5	2

	#tablespoons/oz	calories	total fat	MUF*	PUF*	SAT*	Fiber
Sunflower Kernels	3	170	14	3	9	1.5	3
Pumpkin	3	160	14	5	6	2.5	2
Sesame	3	160	14	5	7	2	3
Chia	4	140	9	1	7	1	9
Ground Flax	4	160	12	2	9	1	8

*MUF = monounsaturated fat, PUF = polyunsaturated fat, SAT = saturated fat

Ways to Include Nuts and Seeds in Your Diet

- Choose unsalted or lightly salted nuts and seeds to keep salt intake low.
- Enjoy peanut butter or almond butter toast in the morning for breakfast along with fresh fruit.
- Add nuts to stir fry meals or cooked vegetables, like green beans with slivered almonds.
- Sprinkle chopped nuts or seeds into hot or cold cereal in the morning.
- Have a handful of roasted or raw mixed nuts and seeds as a snack instead of chips.
- Try a handful of mixed nuts and seeds and a piece of fruit for a balanced snack.
- Include nuts on a large salad meal at lunch instead of added cheese.
- Add a few spoonfuls of chia seeds and/or ground flaxseeds into baked goods for added fiber.
- “A handful, not a can full.” Never eat nuts and seeds directly out of a jar or can. Take out a handful and put the container back in the cupboard before you start to eat them.
- Roasting nuts gives them more flavor, and is a good way to prepare nuts as a garnish. Place nuts evenly on a sheet pan and roast in a 350° F oven for 5 to 10 minutes. Small nuts, such as slivered almonds or chopped hazelnuts, can be toasted in a dry frying pan over fairly high heat. Keep the nuts moving with a spatula to keep them from burning.
- Make a batch of trail mix (use the recipe below) and store in a covered container. Enjoy 1/3 cup as a snack. Trail mix travels well and doesn’t need to be kept cold.

Trail Mix (1 cup recipe)

- 1/4 cup unsalted, roasted or raw mixed nuts and seeds
- 1/4 cup dried fruit (raisins, craisins, apricots, apples, cherries)
- 1/2 cup of a combination of whole grain cereal or chex mix

Teach Back

What is the most important thing you learned from this handout?

What changes will you make in your diet/lifestyle, based on what you learned today?

If you are a UW Health patient and have more questions please call UW Health at one of the phone numbers below. You can also visit our website at www.uwhealth.org/nutrition.

Nutrition clinics for UW Hospital and Clinics (UWHC) and American Family Children's Hospital (AFCH) can be reached at **(608) 890-5500**.

Nutrition clinics for UW Medical Foundation (UWMF) can be reached at **(608) 287-2770**.

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint – Meriter, Swedish American or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright 1/2019 University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#414.