

Nuts

Weight Control

As long as you control total calories, eating a handful of nuts daily may help prevent weight gain and possibly promote weight loss. The fat, protein and fiber in nuts help you feel full longer, so you may eat less during the day. By helping induce a feeling of satiety, nuts may help people feel less deprived and not like they're "dieting." Just limit your portion to a healthy handful.

Diabetes

Women in a Harvard School of Public Health study who reported eating 5 or more 1 ounce servings of nuts/peanuts per week reduced their risk of Type 2 diabetes by almost 30 percent compared to those who rarely or never ate nuts. Women in the study who ate five tablespoons of peanut butter each week reduced their risk for Type 2 diabetes almost 20 percent. (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, Nov. 27, 2002.)

Nut Nutrition

Some nutrients associated with nuts include magnesium, manganese, protein, fiber, zinc and phosphorus.

A sampling of nuts in the news for their contribution to specific nutrients include:

- **Walnuts.** One ounce of walnuts (about 14 shelled walnut halves) is all that is needed to meet the 2002 dietary recommendation of the Food Nutrition Board of the National Academies' Institute of Medicine for omega-3 fatty acids.
- **Almonds.** One ounce of almonds (about 20 to 24 shelled whole almonds) provides 35 percent of your daily value for vitamin E. Vitamin E may help promote healthy aging. A study reported in the *Journal of the American Association* (June 26, 2002) suggests a diet rich in foods containing vitamin E may help protect some people against Alzheimer's disease. The study also found vitamin E in the form of supplements was not associated with a reduction in the risk of Alzheimer's disease.
- **Peanuts.** Though often discussed with nuts, peanuts are a legume along with dry beans, peas and lentils. One ounce of roasted peanuts provides about 10 percent of the daily value of folate, a B vitamin recommended to help reduce the incidence of birth defects and lower the risk of heart disease. Peanuts also are an excellent source of niacin, providing about 20 percent of the daily value.

As a group, nuts also are important for what they DON'T offer:

- **Cholesterol.** Nuts are cholesterol-free.
- **Sodium.** Unless salt is added to nuts, they naturally contain, at most, just a trace of sodium.

Easy to use

Coming up with ways to fit them into your diet is no problem. You can slip toasted nuts into salads, stir-frys and just about any cookie recipe. Ground, they can thicken a sauce or a curry, or replace flour in piecrusts. Or, you can eat them as is -- a few go a long way toward satisfying the urge to snack.

For parties, they're easy and versatile. You can roast pumpkin seeds with chiles and garlic to make Mexican-style pepitas; add five-spice powder and fennel for an Asian taste; toss with flattened rice, raisins and spices for an Indian chiwda; or simply toast with a little rosemary (see accompanying recipes).

The real challenge is keeping yourself from inhaling handful after addictive handful, or pigging out on sugar-glazed versions.

Nuts are calorie bombs. One ounce -- 23 almonds, or a scant 1/4 cup of peanuts -- has about 160 to 180 calories, which is about one-tenth or so of daily caloric intake. The studies show that all you need to improve your health is 1 ounce (or 1 tablespoon of nut butter), five days a week

Chocolate Mini-Cakes

1 cup finely ground walnuts
1/2 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
1 cup sugar
3 Tbs. canola oil
8 egg whites, beaten until stiff with 1/2 tsp. salt
1/4 cup powdered sugar

Combine nuts, cocoa, sugar, oil. Fold in 1/4 of egg whites. Add rest of egg whites. Spoon batter into non-stick or oiled mini-muffin pans. Bake at 350 degrees for 12 minutes. Cool 5 minutes. Remove from pan, sprinkle with powdered sugar. *Makes 48.*