

16 reasons to go nuts for nuts

A recent article in the New England Journal of Medicine underscores the health benefits of nuts (“Association of Nut Consumption with Total and Cause-Specific Mortality”). Researchers followed over a hundred thousand men and women over a period of several decades and concluded that nut consumption helped them stave off the Grim Reaper.

In fact, seven or more servings of nuts per week cut the risk of dying by a third! (“A serving” was defined as one ounce)

Specifically, consumers of nuts five or more times per week were found to enjoy a 29% reduction in death from heart disease; an 11% reduction in death from stroke; a 23% reduction in death from infection; a 24% reduction in death from respiratory diseases; a 29% reduction in death from kidney disease; and an 11% reduction in death from cancer.



It’s long been known that nuts are heart-healthy. A now-famous study of Seventh-Day Adventists who consume a low-fat, plant-based diet compared non-nut consumers to nut-consumers, anticipating that the addition of fat- and calorie-laden nuts might raise their heart disease risk. Au contraire!

Even though they were already on a heart-healthy predominantly vegetarian diet, those Adventists who consumed nuts at least five times weekly had a *48% lower risk of death from coronary heart disease and a 51% lower risk of a nonfatal heart attack compared to those who consumed nuts less than once weekly.*

Ironically, the Federal Government doesn’t want nut manufacturers to broadcast these benefits to consumers. In a recent case, the Food and Drug Administration sent a sharply-worded warning letter to Diamond Food, Inc., a manufacturer of walnuts, ordering them to “cease and desist” from making medical claims about their products. They even threatened to confiscate the “misbranded” nuts as illegal contraband!

It seems that, the way the officials see it, if nuts are to be advertised as reducing the risk of a specific disease, they must undergo the same rigorous application process as drugs, an insurmountable regulatory hurdle that would require years of wrangling and hundreds of millions of dollars.

Meanwhile, and fortunately, we don’t need FDA approval to enjoy the many health benefits of nuts. Here are 16 reasons why you might want to include them frequently in your diet.

1) Nuts Are a Perfect VEGAN Food: With the current emphasis on plant-based diets,

nuts provide a great complement to grains, fruits and vegetables, and legumes. They add protein and healthy oils to balance vegetarian diets that might otherwise tend to be carb-rich and skimpy in beneficial fats and certain vitamins and minerals.

2) Nuts Are PALEO: That is, with the exception of peanuts, which are actually legumes, sometimes spurned by hard-core Paleo adherents because of their lectin content. Tree nuts and seeds are ancient staples of the human diet to which millions of years of evolution have made us well-adapted.

3) Nuts are LOW-CARB, low GI: The Glycemic Index, or GI, is a determinant of how quickly the sugars in foods are digested, absorbed, and released into the bloodstream. High-GI foods are thought to overwhelm the body's sugar-handling capabilities, resulting in progression towards Metabolic Syndrome and diabetes. Nuts are relatively low-carb to begin with, and the carbs they contain are released slowly after a meal. They make a great snack to stave off sugar-craving or hypoglycemia.

4) Nuts promote SATIETY: While nuts are caloric, eating them promotes a sensation of fullness (satiety) that fends off the munchies for less healthy fat-laden or sugar-laden junk food. Some studies suggest that adding nuts to your diet can actually help you lose weight.

5) Nuts are high in FIBER: While not traditionally thought of as a high-fiber food, nuts are rich in soluble fiber, the best kind for reducing the risk of cancer and heart disease.

6) Nuts are a rich source of PHYTOSTEROLS: These plant sterols are thought to bind to cholesterol and help to sweep it harmlessly out of the body; phytosterols are even recognized by the American Heart Association as a natural way to reduce heart disease risk.

7) Nuts contain HEALTHY FATS AND OILS: Nuts are rich in the essential fatty acids linoleic acid and alpha linolenic acid. Note the word *essential*: the body cannot make these oils on its own, and we must obtain them from outside sources. Lack of these essential fatty acids can cause dry skin, inflammation, infertility, mood and memory problems, and promote heart disease.

8) Nuts are a great source of VITAMIN E: Getting your vitamin E from a pill may not be as good as getting natural vitamin E from nuts and seeds. There are actually eight different forms of natural vitamin E tocopherols and tocotrienols: nuts deliver the full spectrum of this critical antioxidant.

9) Nuts are rich in B VITAMINS: Nuts provide many vital B-complex vitamins such as riboflavin, niacin, thiamin, pantothenic acid, vitamin B-6, and folates.

10) Nuts are a source of critical POLYPHENOLS: Polyphenols are plant-derived antioxidants that protect the body from free radicals. Nuts contain a wide variety of polyphenols including resveratrol, lutein, cryptoxanthin and many others. Some seeds, like flaxseed and sesame, are rich in lignans, a specific subtype of polyphenols that may protect against reproductive cancers.

11) Nuts are the richest plant source of ZINC: A mineral critical for immunity and reproductive function, strict vegetarians sometimes don't get enough.

12) Nuts are high in MAGNESIUM: Consider magnesium the *energy* mineral; its lack may be felt as fatigue or irritability and it can even increase the risk of heart problems, diabetes and high blood pressure. Magnesium's role in bone metabolism is often underestimated.

13) Nuts deliver COPPER: Unless you fancy liver or oysters, nuts and seeds are your best bet as dietary sources for the essential trace mineral copper.

14) Nuts provide SELENIUM: Just two or three Brazil nuts per day can give you all the immune-boosting selenium your body needs, especially if you're not fond of fish or meat.

15) Nuts are PORTABLE: Unlike baked chicken breast or poached salmon, a small packet of nuts can easily be stashed in your briefcase, purse or backpack, ready to provide an instant, non-perishable hunger-banishing snack in the office, during your commute, or on the trail.

16) Nuts are VERSATILE: They can be used as stand-alone snack foods; spread on sandwiches (with all the nut butter varieties available, you don't need to get hung up on just traditional PB – try almond, cashew or hazelnut butter, just to name a few); crumbled to add flavor to salads or vegetable side dishes; mixed with grains to provide a taste accent; as a gluten-free crust for baked fish or chicken; substituted for sugary sprinkles to complement your favorite dessert; or even power-blended into your favorite smoothie.

With all the health benefits, and the many ways available to enjoy them, there's very little reason for most people not to go just a little bit nuts for nuts.