The Benefit of Nuts and Seeds

Many recent studies have shown that 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 contain:

- Low levels of saturated fats and no cholesterol.
- High levels of 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 eaten in place of saturated and trans fats. The nutrients in nuts and seeds also help maintain healthy blood vessels.

Even if you need to lose weight, you can still eat nuts and seeds as long as you eat them 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 and saturated fat than a candy bar.

Are all nuts good for you?
Most nuts contain mainly mono-unsaturated fats. This includes almonds, walnuts, pecans, cashews, Brazil nuts, chestnuts, hazelnuts, peanuts, and pistachios. Many nuts, like walnuts, contain omega-3 fatty acids. Omega-3s are a form of fatty acids that may benefit your heart. Other nuts, like 1 ounce of almonds, provide the amount of calcium in ¼ cup of milk as well as 3 grams of dietary fiber.

What about seeds?
Just like nuts, seeds are great sources of unsaturated fats as well as fiber. Some examples are pumpkin, sunflower, sesame, chia, and ground flax. Like walnuts, ground flaxseeds contain high amounts of omega-3 fatty acids. Be sure to consume flaxseeds in its grounded form. 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 of peanuts (28 kernels) has 170 calories whereas 2 level tablespoons of peanut butter have 190 calories. 1 ounce of sunflower seeds has 165 calories whereas 2 level tablespoons of sunflower seed butter have 200 calories. Choose natural peanut butter (oil separates at the top of the jar), if you want to avoid the trans fat and sugar in many name brand peanut butter.
How often should I eat nuts and seeds, and what amount should I eat?

Nuts and seeds are easy to store, easy to take with you to work or school but they are also easy to overeat. Most people can enjoy about a handful of a variety of nuts and seeds daily without getting too many calories. One serving of nuts and seeds is equal to one ounce. One serving of nut or seed butter is two tablespoons. The chart below gives information on calories, types of fat and fiber content of one serving of nuts and seeds.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>#tablespoons/oz</th>
<th>calories</th>
<th>total fat</th>
<th>MUF*</th>
<th>PUF*</th>
<th>SAT*</th>
<th>Fiber</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunflower Kernels</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pumpkin</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sesame</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ground Flax</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Suggestions on how to include nuts and seeds in your diet

- Make sure to choose unsalted nuts and seeds to keep sodium intake low.
- Enjoy peanut butter or almond butter toast in the morning for breakfast along with fruit or juice.
- 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 in place of cookies or candy bars.
- 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 a fuller 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 a 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. Use 1/3 to 1/2 cup as a snack, or 1 cup of trail mix to replace a meal on occasion. 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 cereal, pretzels, low fat crackers, 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 contact UW Health at one of the phone numbers listed 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

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 2/2015 University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Clinical Nutrition Services Department and the Department of Nursing HF#414.