

GO NUTS!

Once considered taboo, experts now say these nuggets of nutrition are actually good for you.

Boy, talk about a bad rap! About 25 years ago, when our nation’s dietary fat phobia was getting into full swing, nuts were put in between butter tarts and spareribs on the “Foods to Avoid” list. Several generations of Canadians have been convinced that nuts are bad, with a capital “B”. Well, that has all changed. Even though nuts have a high fat content, they are now considered a “healthy food” brimming with nutrients that are good for us.

Most nuts are the seeds of trees. Peanuts, also called groundnuts, are the exception as they are actually legumes. Although nuts are high in total fat (50 percent fat by weight), the type of fat in nuts is healthy. Nuts contain oils rich in monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fat. As they are derived from plants, they do not have any cholesterol. Nuts are also a nutrition favourite because they are entirely trans fat-free and low in saturated fat. And nuts are low in sodium, unless you munch on the salted or seasoned variety. A great way to boost your fibre intake is to crunch on nuts, especially almonds. Walnuts are one of the dietary stars for plant-based, protective omega-3 fatty acids. And when it comes to the greatest ratio for healthy unsaturated fat compared to saturated fat, hazelnuts, almonds, pecans and walnuts take the top prize.

While nuts are rich in nutrition, most are also well-endowed with calories. Keep portions to a small handful or a sprinkling into or onto other foods. Buy unshelled nuts for snacking. They’re better for your blood pressure because they’re not slated, and it helps you control portions if you have to dig them out of their shell. Nuts have many of the same nutrients found in meat, such as protein, iron, thiamine and phosphorus. Therefore, nuts are included in the Meat and Alternatives food group of Canada’s Food Guide. One-quarter cup or 60 ml of shelled nuts is equivalent to eating 2 ½ ounces or 75 grams of cooked meat or poultry. And talk about a “fast food”! Nuts require no peeling, trimming, chopping, cooking or clean-up. They’re ready to go and easy to take with you wherever and whenever.

Nuts add wonderful texture and rich flavour to food. The goodness of nuts can be enjoyed in a variety of ways – natural or roasted, whole, sliced, chopped, or ground. Nuts are also made into butters and cooking oils. Due to their high fat content, nuts can easily go rancid. Their quality can also be affected by light, heat and moisture. It’s best to store nuts in an airtight container in a cool, dry place away from the light. If you don’t plan to use nuts for several weeks, store them in the freezer in their shells or an unopened container.

Go ahead – be nutty!

There are many ways to add nuts into your diet. Be creative!

- Sprinkle onto cereal (hot or cold), yogurt, salads, steamed vegetables
- Stir into pancake or waffle batter
- When baking, add to cookies, muffins, loaves, cakes and scones
- Toss into stir-fries, casseroles, stuffing, curries and pasta
- Put into turkey, chicken or tuna sandwich fillings
- Mix into homemade granola, trail mix or muesli
- Put a handful into snack-sized reseal-able bags and take to school or work for a snack
- spread nut butters (almonds, cashew, hazelnut) or peanut butter on high-fibre crackers, rice cakes, whole-grain bread or celery

Nutrients your heart will love

Nutrient

Monounsaturated fat

Omega-3 fat

Soluble fibre

Potassium, Calcium, Magnesium

Heart healthy Function

Keeps your protective HDL cholesterol high

Reduce the chance of blockages in the artery

Lowers unhealthy LDL cholesterol and helps control blood glucose levels

Helps control blood pressure

Nuts by the numbers

Nut Type	Almonds	Brazil nuts	Cashews	Chestnuts	Hazelnuts(filberts)
Number of nuts equal to 1 oz or 25g	22	7	18	3	20
Calories	169	186	163	69	178
Fibre (g)	3.3	1.5	0.9	1.4	2.7
Total Fat (g)	15.0	18.8	13.1	0.3	17.2
Monounsaturated fat (g)	3.6	6.5	7.7	0.2	2.4
Polyunsaturated fat (g)	9.5	6.8	2.2	0.1	13.2
Ratio unsaturated to saturated fat*	11.0	2.9	3.8	--	12.0
Nut Type	Peanuts	Pecans	Pine nuts	Pistachios	Walnuts
Number of nuts equal to 1 oz or 25g	28	20 halves	16	47	14 halves
Calories	166	196	160	158	185
Fibre (g)	2.3	2.7	1.3	2.9	1.9
Total Fat (g)	14.1	20.4	14.4	12.6	18.5
Monounsaturated fat (g)	4.4	5.8	5.4	3.9	2.5
Polyunsaturated fat (g)	7.0	12.5	6.1	6.8	13.4
Ratio unsaturated to saturated fat*	5.7	10.2	5.2	6.7	9.4

* A higher number for the ratio means the nut has healthier fat content

Source: Written by Wendy Shah, registered dieticians with the Diabetes, Hypertension and Cholesterol Centre, Alberta Health Services – Calgary Health Region, Apple Magazine.

To speak to a health professional, contact your family doctor or speak to a registered nurse 24 hours a day, seven days a week by calling: Calgary Health Link at 403-943-LINK (5465) or toll free at 1-866-408-LINK (5465). Mandarin Health Link 403-943-1554, Cantonese Health Link 403-943-1556.