

full

GO NUTS

**Always thought that nuts were too fatty?
Fear not: their fat is in all the right places,
and that's just part of the story.**

BY RADHA MARCUM

LOOKING FOR A FEW EXCUSES TO EAT MORE NUTS?

Try these: the little nutrient bombs provide healthy amounts of fiber, protein, vitamin E, folic acid, niacin, magnesium, copper, potassium, and argenine (an amino acid that protects arterial walls). Recent studies have shown that—despite being rich in fat—they actually reduce your risk of heart attack or other coronary event (by as much as 50 percent), protect you from type II diabetes, lower your risk for macular degeneration, and may even help control weight, says Dr. Ann Kulze, a physician and corporate wellness trainer based in Charleston, North Carolina. So why have nuts gotten such a bad rap over the years?

“When people swung strongly [in past decades] toward low- to no-fat diets, they automatically moved away from eating nuts,” says Dr. Georgianna Donadio, a clinical nutritionist, medical educator, and director of the National Institute of Whole Health (www.niwh.org) based in Wellesley, Massachusetts. “Nuts are high in fat,” she says, “but the good news is the fats they’re high in are monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats—which are actually beneficial in preventing heart disease.” In fact, like other plant-based foods, nuts are naturally cholesterol-free and, when eaten in moderation, can help lower LDL (bad) cholesterol levels. Even macadamia nuts—so long a nutritional no-no—have proven heart-healthy in recent studies. The one exception is coconut, due to its high saturated-fat content.

Studies also show that a healthy serving of nuts from time to time may bolster your bones against osteoporosis and help prevent tooth decay (due to their high magnesium content), help prevent reproductive problems and birth defects (due to folate and manganese), help metabolize key nutrients (zinc),

protect against certain types of cancer (selenium and other phytonutrients such as ellagic acid), and combat oxidative cell damage due to free radicals (thank abundant vitamin E).

And if you live a particularly active lifestyle, you may want to stash a few handfuls of your favorite nuts in your gym bag or backpack. Because they offer a good amount of protein, nuts give you a more sustained energy boost than typical carbo-loaded snacks. Other nut nutrients, including choline, are particularly beneficial for maintaining energy levels in athletes. Choline, plentiful in peanuts, contributes to the normal functioning of cells and is depleted by hard physical activity. One study found that marathon runners improved their times by about five minutes when they were given choline before and during a 20-mile run. But you don’t have to run marathons to enjoy nuts’ energy perks. They make perfect workday snacks, too.

“Almonds and pistachios are great as an afternoon pickup because they’re loaded with potassium,” says Donadio. “The adrenal glands [which are taxed by stress] need potassium to help regulate energy levels.”

Based on recent studies, Donadio suggests eating 1 ounce of nuts (about what will fit into your cupped hand) five times a week. Because nuts are calorie-dense, she recommends keeping a food journal for one week and then substituting nuts, calorie-for-calorie, for foods high in starch (such as white bagels and pasta) and saturated fat (such as red meat).

“I think the best way to include nuts in your daily diet is to have them for your midafternoon snack,” says Kulze. “Their fats satisfy you quickly, and their protein staves off hunger until dinnertime.”

Nut Jobs

Eating plain nuts seem too boring?
Donadio and Kulze suggest these easy ways to get
more nuts in your balanced diet:

Sprinkle ground or whole nuts, such as almonds or walnuts, onto your granola or oatmeal.

Add cashews or peanuts to Asian-vegetable stir-fries.

Pine nuts are fantastic in pesto. Other nut sauces are also delicious.

Enhance yogurt or ice cream (or just about anything, really) with slivered almonds.

Toss walnuts with fresh greens for a quick salad. Bake salmon covered in ground nuts.

Trail mix, anyone?






Mix nuts into batter for breads, muffins, cakes, cookies, and other baked goods. Pistachios are particularly delicious in puddings and cakes.

Spread nut butters on apple slices or use as a dip for crudités for a delicious, ultrahealthy snack.

Nutrient Bombs

Can't decide which nut would satisfy you best? Try Kulze's and Donadio's hands-down favorites—almonds and walnuts—or check out our nutty nutritional guide and tips below.

NUTRITIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

	ALMONDS	Particularly good source of vitamin E (33% of your daily value [DV] per 1-ounce serving), magnesium (21% DV), and calcium (7% DV). Contain 5.6 grams of protein per serving.
	CASHEWS	High in magnesium (18% DV), zinc (10% DV), and iron (9% DV).
	PEANUTS	Excellent source of vitamin E (12% DV), thiamin (12% DV), niacin (17% DV), folate (17% DV), and magnesium (12% DV). Also high in protein (7.2 grams per serving). <i>Note:</i> The peanut is actually a legume, not a true nut, but it has many of the same properties as nuts.
	PECANS	Provide ample amounts of thiamin (16% DV), magnesium (9%), and zinc (10%).
	WALNUTS	Good source of vitamin B ⁶ (8% DV), magnesium (12% DV), and omega-3 fatty acids.

