

## In a Nut Shell

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Nuts are a great snack since they are easy to store, to pack, and are full of nutrients. All nuts contain significant amounts of protein and fat although some nuts have more heart-healthy nutrients than others.

As with all foods containing fat it is important to know the type of fat. Most nuts contain a mix of the healthful mono- and polyunsaturated fats, and are low in the disease promoting *trans* fats and saturated fats. These both contribute to the development of heart disease. This means that people who eat nuts along with a heart-healthy diet can lower LDL or “bad” cholesterol. A high level of LDL can also be a factor in development of heart disease.

Nuts are one of the best plant sources of *Omega-3* fatty acids, the same type of heart-healthy fats contained in oily fish like salmon and mackerel. Walnuts are the best nut source of Omega-3 fats.

Plant sterols are contained naturally in nuts. These *phytochemicals* or plant chemicals can help lower your cholesterol.

Vitamin E acts as an antioxidant to prevent disease causing damage such as the development of plaque, a substance which narrows blood vessels leading to chest pain or a heart attack. Vitamin E also protects tissues such as your skin and the lining of your lungs.

The American Cancer Association has recommended plant-based protein for the prevention of cancer and cardiovascular disease. Substituting plant-based protein from nuts for animal protein like red meat and processed foods will decrease both heart disease and cancer risk.

Nuts are rich in minerals such as calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, selenium, zinc and more. Minerals have significant roles in promoting healthy tissues and metabolism such as in bone development, immunity, and energy production. For example, the Nurses’ Health Study found that subjects who consumed the highest amount of magnesium, about 350 milligrams per day, had significantly less inflammation than those with the lowest intake.

Selenium, found in high levels in Brazil nuts, is a trace mineral which can substitute for Vitamin E in certain reactions. Its function is as an antioxidant to support the immune system and help in wound healing.

All nuts contain Dietary Fiber which aids in digestion to promote a healthy GI tract. Eating fiber makes you eat less and feel full longer which promotes weight loss. Fiber reduces fat absorption, increases the excretion of cholesterol, and reduces production of cholesterol in the liver thereby promoting heart health. Fiber also has a role in controlling blood sugar.

Ugh, the dreaded calories! Yes, since nuts are high in fat they have lots of calories. Remember that most of the fat in nuts is healthy fat. So eat nuts in moderation and as a replacement for less healthy snacks. Pairing 2 tablespoons of nut butter with a piece of fruit or vegetable sticks, in place of those chips with dip, will decrease caloric value and increase nutrient value.

Aim to consume a variety of nuts, as each kind of nut contains varied amounts of vitamins, minerals and ratios of healthy fats. Opt for nuts in their most natural state with the skin such as whole almonds rather than flaked almonds since the skin is full of phytochemicals, in this case flavanoids. Choose nuts without added oils or salt to get optimum benefit. A handful of nuts, approximately the size of a golf ball, is about 1 ounce. This is a reasonable serving. It is best to store nuts in the refrigerator to prevent them from becoming bitter or rancid.

The nuts that are most heart healthy are: walnuts, almonds, hazelnuts and pecans.

The American Heart Association recommends 4 servings of unsalted nuts per week. The USDA states: “Eating 1.5 ounces per day of most nuts as part of a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol may reduce the risk of heart disease.”



**Bernards Township Health Department**

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Food	Benefits	Calories	Protein	Saturated Fat	Total Fat
<b>Almonds</b> ~22 nuts/1 oz.	Great for those who avoid dairy, since high in calcium and magnesium. Half daily Vitamin E. High in folate. Low in saturated fat.	160	6g	1 g	14
<b>Brazil Nuts</b> ~6 nuts/1 oz.	Largest nut. Provides 100% daily value for Selenium, good for prostate health. Good amount of mono- and poly-unsaturated fats but high in saturated fat.	185	4g	4g	19g
<b>Cashew Nut</b> ~18 nuts/1 oz.	Good level of protein, zinc and iron. High in unsaturated fat.	163	5g	3g	13
<b>Hazelnuts</b> ~21 nuts/1 oz.	Also known as Filberts. Rich in mono-unsaturated fats, vitamin E, copper, iron, and manganese. Good for heart disease and Parkinson's. Good source of folate, a B vitamin, which keeps homocysteine, an amino acid associated with heart disease within normal limits. Low in saturated fat	184	4g	1 g	17g
<b>Macadamia Nuts</b> ~10 nuts/1 oz.	One of the highest fat containing nuts, although about 75% of the fat is monounsaturated, it also contains a high amount of saturated fat. Has a rich amount of fiber. A rich source of manganese.	202	2g	3g	21g
<b>Peanuts</b>	Are a legume, like beans, not a nut, but are high in protein. High in flavanoids, plant sterols, good source of vitamin B3 (Niacin).	170	7g	2 g	14 g
<b>Pecans</b> ~19 halves/1 oz.	Heart-healthy with high amount of sterols which help to lower cholesterol. Antioxidant rich to prevent plaque formation. High in fat, but high in monounsaturated fats and Vitamin B3 or Niacin.	200	3 g	2 g	21 g
<b>Pine Nuts</b> ~240 nuts /1.5 oz.	Found inside pine cones. Good source of vitamin E and phosphorus	188	4 g	1 g	19 g
<b>Pistachio Nuts</b> ~69 nuts/1 oz.	Rich in Vitamin B6 which helps in PMS. The only nut with decent amounts of <u>lutein</u> and zeaxanthin, the antioxidants important for eye health. High in fiber and potassium.	160	6 g	2 g	13 g
<b>Walnuts</b> ~14 halves/1 oz.	High antioxidant content to help fight cancer. High in monounsaturated fats which help lower LDL. Rich in Omega-3 fats, a great alternative to eating fatty fish.	190	4 g	2 g	18g



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