
Health Benefits of Nuts

Nuts are single-seeded fruits with a hard shell that grow on trees.¹ Peanuts are legumes that grow underground, but have similar nutritional properties as nuts. Tree nuts and peanuts contain a variety of vitamins, minerals, fatty acids, and phytonutrients linked to health benefits. From a handful of almonds as a snack to thinned cashew butter as a sauce for vegetables, there are many creative and delicious ways to incorporate nuts into your diet and support your health.

TYPES OF NUTS:

- Acorn
- Almond
- Brazil nut
- Cashew
- Chestnut
- Ginkgo nut
- Hazelnut (filbert)
- Hickory nut
- Macadamia
- Peanut (technically a legume, but consumed like other nuts)
- Pecan
- Pili nut
- Pine nut
- Pistachio
- Walnut

Nutrients in Nuts

Nuts are rich in nutrients linked to health benefits.¹ Some of the vitamins, minerals, and phytonutrients found in nuts include:¹⁻⁶

- Monounsaturated fats
- Polyunsaturated fats, including linoleic acid (LA), an omega-6 fatty acid, and alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), an omega-3 fatty acid
- Vitamin E
- Magnesium
- Copper
- Selenium
- Phytonutrients, including phytosterols and polyphenols
- Fiber

The Health Benefits of Nuts

Cardiometabolic Health Benefits

Eating tree nuts and peanuts is linked to reductions in total cholesterol, VLDL particle number, LDL particle number, apolipoprotein B, and triglyceride levels.⁷⁻¹⁰ While the improvements are modest, they may support cardiovascular health when combined with other healthy diet and lifestyle choices.

Nut intake is associated with a reduced risk of coronary heart disease (CHD), stroke, and cardiovascular disease (CVD).¹¹ Nuts, including walnuts, are linked to a healthier blood vessel lining,^{12,13} which is important for regulating blood pressure and cholesterol buildup.¹⁴

Many compounds in nuts may support cardiometabolic health. Phytosterols, a type of phytonutrient in nuts, block cholesterol absorption in the gut and may contribute to cholesterol-lowering effects.¹⁵ Monounsaturated fats in nuts may help the body eliminate LDL cholesterol,¹⁶ while fatty acids and polyphenols may reduce oxidative stress associated with CVD.¹⁷

Nut Allergies

Tree nut and peanut allergies are two of the most common food allergies.^{35,36} People who are allergic to tree nuts and/or peanuts may be able to consume seeds instead, such as hemp, pumpkin, sesame, chia, flax, and sunflower seeds and their butters.

Nut intake is also linked to modestly improved sensitivity of the body to insulin, the hormone that brings glucose into cells.¹⁸ Improved insulin sensitivity is linked to better blood sugar control.

Gut Health Benefits

The research on nuts and gut health is mixed. Some research suggests that nuts have targeted effects on the gut microbiota, the community of microbes that lives in the gut.¹⁹ For example, almond and walnut intake is linked to a boost in beneficial bacteria species and increased microbiota diversity, which is associated with better health.²⁰⁻²⁵ Nuts may support gut health by providing fiber and phytonutrients, such as polyphenols, that aid the growth of beneficial gut bacteria.^{19,26}

Brain Health Benefits

Nut intake is associated with increased blood flow to the brain,^{27,28} which improves oxygen and nutrient delivery to this vital organ. It is also linked to a reduced risk of cognitive decline.^{29,30} Fatty acids and antioxidants in nuts may support brain blood flow.²⁸

Reduced Cancer Risk

Tree nut and peanut intake is associated with a reduced risk of cancer, including colon, pancreatic, and lung cancer.³¹ Nut intake may influence cancer risk by providing fiber that supports the elimination of toxins in stool and by promoting gut health,³¹ which is linked to cancer development.³²

Reduced Oxidative Stress

Oxidative stress occurs when there is an imbalance between harmful free radicals, which can damage DNA and cells in the body, and the body's ability to neutralize them. Eating nuts, such as almonds, is associated with reduced markers of oxidative stress and improved antioxidant activity in the body.^{33,34} Antioxidant vitamins and phytonutrients in nuts may support oxidative stress reduction.^{33,34}



How to Add Nuts to Your Diet

When grocery shopping for nuts, choose ones that are unsalted and free of added sugars. Avoid nuts roasted in vegetable oils such as sunflower oil, which can be damaged by heat^{37,38} and become inflammatory to the body.^{39,40} Choose plain nut butters that are free of added sugars and hydrogenated oils. Here are some ways to incorporate nuts into your diet:

- **Acorns:** After soaking and boiling, acorns can be ground into flour and used for baking, or they can be added to soups or stews.
- **Almonds:** Use sliced almonds as a topping on hot cereal, eat whole almonds as a snack, or use almond flour in place of white flour for baking.
- **Brazil nuts:** Snack on a few Brazil nuts. Be careful not to overeat Brazil nuts, as they are very high in selenium and it is possible to consume too much selenium.
- **Cashews:** Enjoy cashew butter with apple slices, mix with rolled oats and dried fruit to make energy bites, or use to make a sauce for vegetables.
- **Chestnuts:** Add soaked and peeled chestnuts to soups or stews.
- **Hazelnuts (filberts):** Use chopped hazelnuts to replace croutons in a salad.
- **Macadamias:** Pair a few macadamia nuts with dark chocolate for an indulgent treat.
- **Peanuts:** Mix peanuts with no-sugar-added raisins for a sweet and salty snack.
- **Pecans:** Add chopped pecans to muffins or quick breads.
- **Pine nuts:** Sprinkle on top of pasta or mix with chopped garlic, lemon, basil, and olive oil to make pesto.
- **Pistachios:** Grind up pistachios to make a crunchy crust for baked chicken or fish.
- **Walnuts:** Mix chopped walnuts into oatmeal or yogurt.

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