

The
Health Benefits
of



Almonds



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According to the USDA's 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans report, among the nutrients found to be lacking in the American diet are vitamin E and magnesium. Almonds are one of the greatest sources of both of these nutrients, providing nearly half of the RDA of vitamin E and almost a quarter of the RDA of magnesium in just a one ounce serving. They are also a source of dietary fiber and calcium.

Backed by significant research, the FDA approved a qualified health claim for nuts in 2003 which states, "Scientific evidence suggests, but does not prove, that eating 1.5 ounces per day of most nuts, such as almonds, as part of a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol may reduce the risk of heart disease."

Most studies suggest that the cardioprotective benefit of almonds is due mostly to their content of monounsaturated fats. In one study, it was found that men and women who ate about a handful of raw whole unblanched almonds each day lowered their LDL, or "bad", cholesterol by 4.4 percent from baseline, and those who ate about two handfuls a day saw a decrease of more than double, or 9.4 percent. Researchers attributed these results to the high content of monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fat and lack of starch in the almonds. Interestingly, neither those participants who ate one handful or two per day for the study period gained weight during that time.

Research has found compounds, called flavonoids, including catechins, flavonols, flavanones, and aglycones in the skin of almonds. It is believed that these compounds, also found in tea, dark chocolate, colorful fruits and vegetables and wine, give almonds antioxidant properties, protecting the body's cells from damage.

Studies have shown us that the flavonoids found in almonds prevent the oxidation of LDL cholesterol, which can make the cholesterol more likely to clog arteries. Further research has shown us that the compounds in almonds may also play a role in the treatment and prevention of diseases such as cancer and diabetes, and additional studies are ongoing to define that role.

High in heart-healthy fat, almonds can promote good health when eaten as part of a balanced diet, including one that is rich in colorful fruits and vegetables, lean meats, low fat dairy products, whole grains and low in saturated fats. While almonds are, ounce for ounce, very nutrient dense, they are also high in calories and fat, and should be consumed in moderation.

While we are confident that the information in this article is accurate, we can in no way take the place of a medical professional. Please consult your doctor before making any changes to your diet.

Sources:

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Appendix B: Food Sources of Selected Nutrients, Agricultural Research Service (ARS) Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 17. Available at: www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/document/html/appendixB.htm

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