I'm delighted to add this guest post by a person who knows nuts like few of us do. Jerry Henkin is a nut grower from New York. As a member of the Northern Nut Growers Association (NNGA) he takes an active role as their librarian and works to build and maintain the organization’s holdings. Jerry is also Vice-President of the New York Nut Growers' Association (NYNGA).

I wish to tell you what I learned about the health benefits of nuts and then describe a simple technique to increase the nutritional value of nuts by soaking and drying them.

Since the inception of the Northern Nut Growers Association in 1910, only 1% of the articles in the Annual Report and The Nutshell magazine have dealt with the nutritional aspect of nuts. Though I am not a professional nutritionist, I have learned a great deal from studying scientific reports on nutrition that deal with nuts from NNGA literature and from the following organizations: The Food and Research Program, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada; Loma Linda University; the Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University; the University of Scranton; Children's Hospital, Oakland Research Institute; Penn State University; the University of Missouri; and the Linus Pauling Institute at Oregon State University. Aging at Tufts University; the University of Scranton; Children's Hospital, Oakland Research Institute; Penn State University; the University of Missouri; and the Linus Pauling Institute at Oregon State University. I wish to thank Dr. Barry Kendler, a Professor of Nutrition at the University of Bridgeport, in Connecticut, who has helped me organize my presentation on nut nutrition.

As growers of nut trees, we seek to produce the best nuts we can grow for consumption by people. There is also an interest among farmers who raise livestock, especially agriculture and permaculture practitioners, in using nuts as forage for animals. All of us should know about the healthful qualities of nuts for our own well being. We should eagerly share this information with others when promoting nuts.

Nuts are concentrated energy foods. Mountain climbers, Arctic explorers, and average hikers carry a portable sack of nuts and dried fruits along with water. Captain Reid Stowe took in-shell hickory nuts on his record-breaking 1,000 day sea voyage. (I should know because I supplied them to him along with mung beans for sprouting.) While nuts are high in calories, just eating a handful – about 2 ounces, or roughly 1/4 cup – 5 days out of the week is enough to make a difference.

Nuts are highly nutritious

Raw nut kernels (without salt, and not roasted in fatty oils, or “honey roasted”) are excellent sources of fiber, proteins, and the “good fats” (monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats). They contain an abundance of antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals. Since each kind of nut has a different percentage of these healthful ingredients, it’s a good idea to eat a variety of nuts: pistachios, different species of walnuts, macadamia nuts, almonds, pecans, hickory nuts, pine nuts, hazelnuts, and chestnuts. Acorns are edible, as well; those of you who attended last year’s meeting in Utah heard Howard Manning speak about the tradition of the Native Americans in California leaching acorns to remove the tannic acid. Then they pound the nuts into a meal.

Lifestyle plays a role in health

Eating nuts is not a guarantee of good health: some of the other factors that come into play are our genetic inheritance; the amount of exercise we do; our lifestyle choices and stress level; and the negative factors like smoking and being overweight. But the scientific studies cited at the end of this article indicate the health benefits of nuts. I believe the nuts themselves are the key to a longer and healthier life.
benefits that can accrue from a regular diet of nuts: They strengthen the immune system, lower cholesterol, and protect the body from viral invasion and tumor growth. They can lower the risk of colon, breast, and prostate cancers. Moreover, eating nuts on a regular basis has been shown to reduce the risk of Type II diabetes. They can lower stress levels. Nuts also reduce the risk of high blood pressure which can lead to cardiovascular diseases. Walnuts and pecans, especially, which are high in antioxidants, reduce the damage caused by free radicals. Almonds and peanuts should be eaten with their skins because they, too, contain high levels of antioxidants. Nuts may even play a role in maintaining healthy sexual function in men.

**Chestnuts have special health benefits**

Chestnuts, unlike other nuts, are a significant source of Vitamin C. They are also rich in vitamin B6, Thiamin, Riboflavin, Folate, and Niacin. Chestnuts have the highest percentage of carbohydrates which has given them the nickname, “the runner’s nut” because they increase the body’s ability to cope with stress. An article in the NNGA Annual Report in 1987, by G.P. Abide, describes how to make chestnut chips as a commercial product. Chestnut flour is another value-added product. Mr. Abide advises nut growers to “be in line with current consumer trends favoring healthful foods.” How much more true that advice is now than 25 years ago.

We need to advise our customers and friends who eat nuts to store them in the refrigerator, and not leave them out on the kitchen table with a cracker and a pick, as inviting as that might sound. Nuts in the shell maintain their flavor longest. Most nuts can be stored in the freezer for years.

Some words of caution about eating nuts: There may be insect larvae within the shell. Also, nut kernels may turn rancid after a period of time if improperly stored. The oils within the kernel will spoil, causing the kernels to look yellowish and waxy. So look at the nuts you’ve just cracked out of the shell for insect infestation; feel them and smell them for signs of rancidity. If you’re cracking out nuts instead of buying the nuts already shelled, make sure to eliminate all shell materials – black walnut fragments can crack a tooth; tiny shell pieces can lodge in between teeth.

**Nut allergies can be serious**

A very small percentage of the population of the United States is allergic to tree nuts and/or peanuts. Some people can die if they consume even minute quantities which might have been added as an ingredient to other food products. In 1964 George Borgstrom wrote an article in the Annual Report calling for nut breeders to develop cultivars that would eliminate the allergens that cause such severe reactions in some people. To my knowledge, no one has taken up this challenge. Please let the NNGA know if this breeding work has been done.

**Nuts enhance the dining experience**

Now for the delicious part: nuts enhance the flavor and texture in bland foods like chicken, cabbage, salad, green beans, vegetable soup, waffles, pancakes, and muffins. While vegetarian restaurants have long served simple dishes using nuts, elegant restaurants have recently been offering pistachio crusted salmon, hazelnut strogonoff, and chocolate-chestnut trifle. Nuts can be added to milkshakes and made into nut milk and nut butters. The Native Americans of Virginia pounded hickory nuts into a paste, soaked them in water, and then used the “cream” as a delicacy. They also fermented this mixture to make a liquor.

**Nuts are a food staple**

Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, a major contributor to nut research in the early 20th Century, pointed out that nuts have double the nutritive value of lean meat, pound for pound. Yet the land required to produce nuts is half that required to raise livestock. Kellogg believed that nuts should be a food staple, and not just a snack. He used nuts extensively as meals to his patients at the Battle Creek Sanitarium in Michigan. In an age of horrible practices in meat slaughterhouses and packing plants, Kellogg said in 1916 that “the nut is sweeter, cleaner, healthier, and cheaper than any possible source of animal product.”

Marion Nestle, a noted nutrition activist, has continued Kellogg’s vision of a world where people eat healthy food. She said that one in seven people on the Earth in 2012 is hungry. She feels that the global food crisis will continue in the U.S. and abroad in cost, volatility, and availability.

In her books, Nestle links malnutrition and hunger with social problems. One approach, she believes is to encourage food co-ops as an alternative to “Big Food” because they
Soaking nuts enhances their nutrition

I'm now going to describe a simple method to increase the nutritional value of nuts which everyone can do as long as they have access to clean water. Barbara Mendez, a licensed pharmacist and nutritional consultant, and Zel Allen, the author of several books on healthy eating, have both written articles on the health benefits of soaking nuts. The process calls for soaking raw nut kernels in water for several hours. The kernels should be the freshest you can find. The soaking period varies from 7 to 12 hours, depending upon the density of the kernel, but cashews should be soaked for no more than 6 hours.

After soaking the kernels, use a paper towel to pat them dry. Then, to return the kernels to their natural crispiness, dry them in one of several ways:

1. Roast them in the oven, or a counter-top toaster oven, at 150° to 170° F. for 15 to 20 minutes
2. Place them in a pan and let them dry over the pilot light of a stove for 12 to 24 hours, depending upon how long you have soaked the nuts
3. Use a food dehydrator set at 118° F. for about 7 hours.

After you've done this for a while, you'll know the best soaking and drying times for nuts. Since each batch of nuts is different, don't be afraid to experiment with the soaking and drying times to produce the healthiest and most delicious nuts you can.

List of Sources


Allen, Zel, "Nuts – the Delicious Path to Good Health", The Nutshell, Volume 62, Number 3, September, 2008, p. 16

Allen, Zel, "To Soak or Not to Soak – It's a Nutty Question", MNGA (Michigan Nut Growers Association) News, Fall, 2011, pp. 7 – 8

Bixby, Willard G. [NNGA President], "Resolution Adopted by the NNGA, Inc.", September 14, 1929, NNGA Annual Report 20:158 – 159 (1929)


Chestnut, V.K., "Primitive Manufacture and Use of Acorn Meal", NNGA Annual Report 8:43 – 45 (1917)


Higdon, Jane (2005), [update, Drake, Victoria J., 2009], "Nuts", Linus Pauling Institute, Oregon State University, 2012

International Nut Tree Council, "Go Nuts Go Healthy", 11 pages, 2001


Kendall, C.W., et al., "Nuts, Metabolic Syndrome and Diabetes", British Journal of Nutrition, 2010 August; 104(4)


Malinsky, Alex (aka RawGuru), "'C' is for Chestnut and Vitamin C", Natural News.com, January 26, 2011


TO SOAK OR NOT TO SOAK—IT’S A NUTTY QUESTION

I’ve often been asked whether it’s necessary to soak nuts before eating them. Is soaking a waste of time or does the process offer nutritional benefits? I thought it would be helpful to provide both views and let people decide what works best for them.

Frequently raw fooders soak nuts in preparation for assembling a recipe like nut milk, nut butter, or nut cheese. Soaking makes nuts softer and creamier and enhances the texture of many raw dishes. I’ve provided a section in my cookbook, The Nut Gourmet, that covers soaking nuts, but this fun and informative blog gives me the opportunity to share the simple process with anyone searching for this information on the internet.

Soaking offers several health benefits. The simple process of soaking nuts for several hours works like magic to increase their antioxidant and phytochemical capacity because soaking releases some enzyme inhibitors.

Some people have difficulty digesting nuts and eliminate them from their diet. They needn’t miss out on the healthful benefits nuts offer because a few hours of soaking does wonders—Soaking is the prelude to the sprouting process and releases enzymes that inhibit the digestibility of nuts. Soaking nuts also helps to break down their macronutrients. Protein, fats, and carbohydrates are broken down into digestible components, turning protein into free flowing amino acids, fats into fatty acids, and carbohydrates into simple sugars, essentially predigesting them.

After soaking for several hours, nuts become very soft and lose their crunchiness. To return them to their natural crispness, dry them with paper towels or a kitchen towel and dehydrate them for several hours at a temperature between 110 and 115 degrees F. Alternatively, you can roast them in the oven. To preserve their valuable vitamin E and antioxidant flavonoid and polyphenol contents, place the nuts on a baking sheet and dry roast them at 150 to 170 degrees F. for 15 to 20 minutes. Transfer the nuts to a dish to cool, and taste their exceptional flavor and pleasantly crisp texture.
Not everyone has problems digesting nuts. For those who do, soaking is definitely helpful. However, soaking adds to extra steps before one can actually eat the nuts. In today’s busy world, few of us are looking for extra processes in order to prepare our foods. I’m a from-scratch cook, but I, too, shun extra steps when they’re not needed.

For most of us with the ability to digest nuts without difficulty, we can reap the multitude of health benefits of eating nuts raw or roasted without soaking. Mother Nature has made a perfect ready-to-eat food that’s packaged in protective shells. Within those protective shells are a storehouse of minerals, heart healthy vitamin E, fiber, protein, and a mountain of antioxidants and phytochemicals. Nuts are a healthy, nutrient dense food that studies have shown to reduce the risk of heart disease when eaten in small quantities like one to two ounces daily. Fortunately for us busy folks, nut processors have also saved us the labor by shelling the nuts and putting them into convenient packages.

WALNUTS & KALE LOVE ME–AND YOU TOO!

I love walnuts! Walnuts and I are great friends who enjoy each other’s company often in a multitude of delicious ways.

I also love kale, and I know I’m certainly not alone–lots of people love kale. Turns out both walnuts and kale love people, too! Those rich and crunchy nuts and dark, chewy, greens are packed with antioxidants–lots of antioxidants.

Don’t ever worry about getting too many antioxidants. It’s practically impossible to do. In fact, most people don’t eat enough of them and suffer health challenges.

To reap walnuts’ and kale’s wonderful antioxidant benefits, pair them up, and turn them into a fabulous salad!

Deliciously nutty and oh! so tasty, this salad is a winning combination of fresh flavors, pleasing textures, and a healthful nutrition boost. A very tasty, delicately sweet Zesty Cilantro Dressing tames the somewhat bitter bite that makes walnuts and kale off-putting to some. The bonus surprise is that this salad is an excellent keeper and tastes just as fresh and charismatic next day.

WALNUTTY KALE SALAD WITH ZESTY CILANTRO DRESSING

Yield: 4 servings
1 bunch fresh kale
3/4 cup Zesty Cilantro Dressing (Recipe below)
2 to 3 medium carrots, coarsely shredded
3/4 cup toasted walnut pieces
1/2 cup black raisins
1/3 cup golden raisins

1. Wash the kale thoroughly and cut or tear away the tough center rib. Tear the kale into bite size pieces, discarding any smaller tough ribs will that make the salad difficult to chew. Place the kale pieces into a large bowl.
2. Pour the Zesty Cilantro Dressing over the kale pieces and use your hands to mix and massage the dressing into the leaves, coating completely.
3. Add the carrots, walnuts, and raisins and toss well to distribute all the ingredients evenly.

Zesty Cilantro Dressing
1 cup lightly packed coarsely chopped fresh cilantro
1 cup water
8 pitted dates, snipped in half
1/2 cup cashews or macadamias
1/4 cup apple cider vinegar
3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
2 garlic cloves
3/4 teaspoon salt
3/4 teaspoon ground cumin
1/2 teaspoon ground coriander
1/2 teaspoon lemon pepper
1/2 teaspoon guar gum or xanthan gum
Pinch cayenne

1. Combine all the ingredients in the blender and blend at high speed until they are fully pureed and the dressing becomes smooth and creamy.
2. Use a funnel to pour the dressing into a narrow-neck bottle for easy serving. Use immediately or chill and use later. Shake well before serving. Refrigerated, the dressing will keep for 1 week. Makes about 2 cups.

CASHEWS ARE IN–MAYO IS OUT!
Posted by Zel Allen’s nutgourmet on July 10, 2011

Potato salad is THE VENERABLE KING at summertime picnics, potlucks, and barbecues. Recently, though, I’ve noticed people take a pass on this old-time favorite, often saying something like, “Oh, I rarely eat potato salad–it’s not very healthy.” How sad for that wonderful bowl of delicious potato salad that can be transformed into a highly nutritious salad.

Sidestep the mayo, trade it for a highly nutritious cashew sauce instead, and you can still enjoy a delicious serving of potato salad at the barbecue. — Especially a potato salad enhanced with sweet potatoes, broccoli, fresh herbs, and a touch of vegan bacon. In an effort to lose the mayo, I devised an inventive substitute that’s actually good for you.

I just whipped up a combination of raw cashews and water in the blender until the mixture became a smooth and creamy sauce. Then, I slathered it on my yummy potato salad and tossed it all together. It’s really easy. You, too, can cashew up and savor every succulent bite of your awesome picnic or potluck treat.

Mayo vs. Cashew Sauce
What makes my cashew sauce more nutritious than mayonnaise? I actually made a comparison of the ingredients in mayo with those of the cashew sauce. It was a no-brainer—the cashew sauce came out on top, really.

Here’s the deal. Mayonnaise is composed mainly of vegetable oil, thickened with egg yolk, and flavored with a touch of lemon juice and salt. Vegetable oil has no protein, no fiber, no minerals, and no vitamins except for vitamin E. Other than Vitamin E, vegetable oil has no antioxidants, either. Vegetable oil is 100% fat. What it does contain is plenty of calories and fat. How about 120 calories and 14 grams of fat for every tablespoon! Yikes!

Mayo’s egg yolk content adds yet another health concern. If it weren’t for the 215 mg of cholesterol in each egg yolk, eggs might be healthful. But that 215 mg of cholesterol presents a challenge for those who struggle with high cholesterol.

Cashews are a Plus
Here comes the good part. Because they are plant-based, cashews contain zero cholesterol and are packed with protein and fiber. In addition, cashews are a storehouse of minerals including calcium, copper, iron, magnesium, manganese, potassium, selenium, and zinc.
Cashews offer healthy doses of vitamins B1, B2, B3, B5, and B6 in addition to high levels of folate, an important member of the B vitamin family that prevents neural tube defects in pregnant women.

Because I’m always blogging about the awesome antioxidant levels in nuts, I’m delighted to mention that cashews enjoy their share of antioxidants. Cashews are blessed with a variety of antioxidants from the vitamin E family like beta tocopherol, gamma, and delta tocopherol. They also have a good measure of lutein and zeaxanthin, antioxidants that help lower the risk of heart disease.

If those little vitamin, mineral, and antioxidant gems from nature aren’t enough to turn you on to Cashew Kissed Potato Salad, here’s one more. Cashews, like all nuts, contain L-arginine. It’s an amino acid most people rarely think about, but they should because it’s so beneficial. Here’s why:

The inner portion of your arteries and blood vessels has a one-cell-thick lining called the endothelium. When you consume foods like nuts that contain L-arginine, the endothelium goes to work manufacturing and releasing nitric oxide. That’s the stuff that relaxes the arteries, allows them to dilate, and provides steady, uninhibited blood flow to and from the heart.

I hope I’ve lured you into at least trying a hearty serving of Cashew Kissed Potato Salad. Besides tasting ultra delicious and looking gorgeous, it’s actually good for you.

**Potato Salad Comes to the Table**

Typical summer entertaining usually centers on casual, outdoor gatherings that provide plenty of opportunities to share a favorite potluck dish like potato salad, or to invite friends and family over for an afternoon or evening of relaxed dining.

A simple, yet rich cashew sauce gives this potato salad its deliciously light coating and offers a pleasant diversity from the familiar mayonnaise base. When you need to bring more greens into the family meal, consider adding them to favorite dishes you know your family will enjoy. Broccoli and fresh herbs turn this summertime salad into a winning side dish, yet offer a chic, elegant, and irresistible way to boost nutrition.

Choose some old favorites, splash them with a dusting of creativity and plenty of colorful veggies, and you’ll come to the table with an extraordinary new dish. That’s exactly what I’ve done with this recipe for a simple potato salad that sparkles with flavor and nuance.

To make the potato salad super creamy, increase the cashew and water measurement to 3/4 cup each or simply double the amount to 1 cup each.

---

**CASHEW-KISSED POTATO SALAD**

Yield: about 8 servings

2 pounds White or Red Rose potatoes, with skin, cut into bite-size pieces
1 pound sweet potatoes or yams, peeled, cut into bite-size pieces
1/4 cup apple cider vinegar, divided
1 large broccoli crown, cut into bite-size florets
1 large carrot, shredded
6 strips Lightlife Fakin’ Bacon, cut into 1/2-inch pieces
1/2 cup finely minced fresh parsley
1/2 cup finely minced fresh mint leaves
1/4 cup finely minced fresh basil leaves
1 1/2 teaspoon salt
Freshly ground pepper
1/2 cup raw cashews
1/2 cup water

1. Place the White or Red Rose potatoes and the sweet potatoes into separate 2 to 3-quart saucepans and cover the potatoes with water. Cover the two pans and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium and simmer for 4 to 5 minutes, or just until fork tender. Immediately, drain the water from each pan and add 2 tablespoons of the apple cider vinegar to each pan. Toss well to coat the potatoes, pour out the excess vinegar, and transfer both the white and sweet potatoes to a large bowl.
2. Rinse one of the saucepans briefly, fill it 2/3 full with water, cover, and bring to a boil over high heat. In batches, blanch the broccoli for 1 1/2 minutes, or until just fork tender, but still firm. Use a slotted spoon to...
remove the florets to a dish to cool. Drain any excess liquid and add the blanched broccoli to the bowl with the potatoes.

3. Add the carrot, Fakin' Bacon, parsley, mint, basil, salt, and pepper.

4. Combine the cashews and water in the blender and blend on high speed until smooth and creamy. Add the cashew sauce to the potatoes and mix gently with a wooden spoon to coat all the ingredients. Adjust seasonings, if needed, and enjoy immediately or chill and serve later.

---

Researchers go nuts over antioxidants!

Hippocrates (480 BCE-370 BCE), the Father of Western medicine, had the secret of antioxidants in a healthy diet, even though he may not have known it when he said, “Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food.” He knew the power of foods from nature was both healing and preventive and emphasized that message to his followers. Though he didn’t have the scientific knowledge that foods from nature, such as tree nuts, contained powerful antioxidants, he witnessed healing taking place when patients ate pure whole foods. He recognized those foods contained remarkable elements that could not only prevent disease but also restore vigor.

Fresh, plant-based foods (nuts, seeds, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes) do, indeed, contain powerful plant chemicals packed with antioxidants. What are these antioxidants and what can they do? While all plant-based foods contain these powerful healing elements, recent research has revealed the impressive antioxidant potential in tree nuts.

Researchers find nut benefits

Intensive tree nut studies have uncovered an array of antioxidant chemicals including lignans, naphthoquinones, phenolic acids, phytoestrogens, polyphenols, flavonoids, proanthocyanidins, and tocopherols that can reduce inflammation in the blood, lower cholesterol, act against viral invasion, and protect the body from tumor growth.

Because we now know that antioxidants can scavenge and prevent unstable molecules called free radicals from destroying our cells, we can take joy in devouring a delicious handful or two of tree nuts every day to reap the many benefits from their excellent antioxidant properties.

In a 2009-study published in the Journal of Human Nutrition and Diet, researchers tested thirteen subjects to study the effect of a polyphenol-rich diet of walnuts or almonds on the blood. The subjects fasted overnight, had blood tests, and then were given either a walnut or almond smoothie or one that contained no nuts. After a week, each participant switched to a different smoothie, and each time, blood was tested several times after beverage consumption. Researchers found a noticeable increase in polyphenols, a type of antioxidant, after subjects consumed the nut-based smoothies, but no change following the nut-free beverage. Noted were a significant increase in total antioxidant capacity and a reduction of blood oxidation in those participants consuming the polyphenol-rich nut smoothie.

Pecans have their own antioxidant story

In another study conducted at Loma Linda University, meals including whole pecans and blended pecans were compared with a control meal with no nuts to test for antioxidant activity. This small trial of sixteen healthy men and women used the crossover method where participants were given each meal at controlled intervals with a week in-between. Blood levels of tocopherals, the vitamin E antioxidant, doubled in those consuming whole and blended pecans, while antioxidant levels increased 12% and 10% respectively two hours after consumption. After meals including whole pecans, LDL oxidation decreased considerably after consumption. Triglycerides decreased only after the participants ate whole or blended pecans in their meals.

Chemistry Professor Joe Vinson, Ph.D. presented his research at a meeting of The American Chemical Society in Anaheim, California in March 2011 showing that walnuts have more high-quality antioxidants than any other nuts. “Walnuts rank above peanuts, almonds, pecans, pistachios and other nuts,” said Dr. Vinson. “A handful of walnuts contains almost twice as much antioxidants as an equivalent amount of any other commonly consumed nut. But unfortunately, people don’t eat a lot of them. This study suggests that consumers should eat more walnuts as part of a healthy diet.”
To roast or not to roast

After Dr. Vinson’s analysis compared the antioxidants in walnuts, almonds, peanuts, pistachios, hazelnuts, Brazil nuts, cashews, macadamias, and pecans, he found antioxidants highest in raw, unroasted nuts. Vinson says, “The heat from roasting nuts generally reduces the quality of the antioxidants. People usually eat walnuts raw or unroasted, and get the full effectiveness of those antioxidants.”

When nuts are commercially roasted in added fats, like partially hydrogenated oils that contain trans fats or coconut or palm oils that are high in saturated fats, they raise the risk of heart disease by elevating the bad cholesterol that can deposit plaque in the arteries. Commercially roasted nuts may also be roasted at high temperatures that possibly damage or reduce antioxidant levels.

Differing opinions persist regarding antioxidant loss when roasting nuts. An inquiry to the California Walnut Commission turned up this response from their nutrition consultant, registered dietician Carol Berg Sloan, “We have had independent nutrient analysis done on raw and toasted walnuts and there is no change in the nutrient profile.”

Plant chemicals in nuts improve heart health

Dr. Joan Sabate, professor of nutrition at Loma Linda University, and colleagues examined 25 nut studies from other countries. Their nut research has shown that regular consumption of nuts reduces the risk of coronary heart disease in several ways: lowering cholesterol levels, improving endothelial function, lowering oxidation in the blood, and reducing lipoprotein(a) levels. The researchers focused both on subjects with normal and high cholesterol and noted that nut consumption led to a marked improvement in both HDL and triglyceride levels. Along with their exceptional nutritional qualities, nuts contain an array of phytonutrients or plant chemicals with high antioxidant capacity.

An almond study at Tufts University unveiled 20 powerful antioxidant flavonoids in almond skins. Some of the flavonoids were the same antioxidants found in familiar foods like green tea that contains catechins and grapefruit that includes naringenin. The research team tested the antioxidants separately and together on blood samples that contained LDL cholesterol. Flavonoids in the almond skins improved the LDL resistance to oxidation by 18%, but when tested together with vitamin E in the meat of the almond, the resistance to oxidation increased by 52.5%. This research illustrates the benefits of the synergy that occur in nature and the importance of eating the whole nut, including the skin.

Which nuts lead the antioxidant parade?

Of all the tree nuts, walnuts, pecans, and chestnuts contain the greatest amount of antioxidants. Although peanuts are technically legumes, they are nutritionally similar to nuts. Like walnuts, peanuts are packed with high levels of antioxidants. Be sure to consume nuts whole to gain their full benefit, since much of the antioxidants are contained in the skins.

Antioxidants and plant chemicals are not the only healthful attributes of nuts. Nuts are an excellent source of protein, a quality that has placed them in the USDA MyPyramid Dietary Guidelines for Americans alongside meat, poultry, and fish. Nuts are also a powerhouse of minerals including calcium, magnesium, potassium, iron, zinc, selenium, and copper that work as a cooperative team to bring excellent health and maximum immune function to the body.

Go nuts for nuts sake

It’s easy to include nuts in the diet. Nut researchers are now finding that two handfuls a day of tree nuts are better than one at delivering health benefits. Enjoy them as a snack, sprinkled in salads, blended into smoothies, ground into salad dressings, blended into nut milk, or included in muffins, cookies, and confections.

Buy them raw and keep them in the refrigerator for freshness. Though people tend to gravitate to one or two favorites, they will benefit from a variety of nuts because each kind contains different quantities of minerals, good fats, and beneficial antioxidants.

To enjoy roasted nuts, consider roasting them at a low temperature to preserve their valuable vitamin E and antioxidant flavonoid and polyphenol contents. Place the nuts on a baking sheet and dry roast them at 150 to 170 degrees F. for 15 to 20 minutes. Transfer the nuts to a dish to cool and taste their exceptional flavor and pleasantly crisp texture.

References:


ONE HAIL OF A KALE SALAD
Post by Zel Allen's nutgourmet on August 31, 2010

Kale is barely visible in the American diet and often appears merely as background garnish on salad bars. Yet, kale is right at the top of the A-list of foods with the highest nutrient density. Packed with vitamin A, vitamin K, and the antioxidants beta carotene and lutein & zeaxanthin, this leafy green ought to be highly praised and given an honored place in the diet several times a week. Hopefully, this tasty recipe will lure you into the kale den.

You might even fall in love with kale after eating this salad because this kale has a partner to charm your taste buds and offer a pleasant crunch. Peanuts, also highly nutritious, are a great source of monounsaturated fat that helps to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease. Often grouped with nuts, peanuts are actually in the legume family and are a rich source of the antioxidant resveratrol that helps to induce good blood flow to the heart and brain.

The antioxidants in peanuts measure up to those fruits with the highest antioxidant levels: pomegranates, blackberries, and strawberries. You may be surprised to discover peanuts contain more antioxidants than apples, carrots, and beets.

Kale makes a gorgeous display on the dinner table and certainly packs a hearty nutritional punch. Dotted with bright red radishes, crisp cucumbers, and crunchy bits of roasted peanuts, this earthy forest green salad is bathed in a rich and creamy dressing that instantly satisfies the savory palate. The secret to softening the kale and making it so much easier to eat is giving it a loving massage, a technique that infuses it with deeper flavor as well. This salad is a great keeper. If you don't finish it in one sitting, you can tuck it into a covered container and keep it refrigerated for up to 3 or 4 days.

ONE HAIL OF A KALE SALAD
WITH CASHEW CAESAR DRESSING

Yield: 6 servings

1 large bunch kale, stems discarded, torn into small bite-size pieces  
1 cup Cashew Caesar Dressing  
1/2 cup unsalted dry roasted peanuts, coarsely ground in a hand-crank nutmill  
1 bunch red radishes, sliced  
2 Persian cucumbers, chopped  
4 green onions, sliced
1/2 ripe avocado, chopped

1. Place the kale into a large mixing bowl and pour the Cashew Caesar Salad Dressing over. Use your hands to massage the dressing into the kale, mixing and massaging for one full minute to soften the kale and infuse it with flavor.

2. Add the peanuts, radishes, cucumbers, and green onions and toss well.

3. Transfer the salad to an attractive serving bowl or platter and sprinkle the chopped avocado over the top.

Note:
If you cannot locate Persian cucumbers, use 1 large cucumber, peeled and chopped

Cashew Caesar Dressing

Caesar salad remains a long-standing favorite. The original dressing was made with a generous measure of Parmesan cheese, anchovies, and a raw egg in a base of olive oil. I’ve taken grand liberties with this oil-free, cashew-based dressing. Far from the standard Caesar, this tasty version has a rich character all its own.

Yield: 2 3/4 cups

2 cups water, divided
1 cup cashews
1 clove garlic, coarsely chopped
1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
1 tablespoon plus 1 1/2 teaspoons dark miso
1 tablespoon nutritional yeast flakes
1 tablespoon vegan Parmesan
1 1/2 teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon rice vinegar
3/4 teaspoon xanthan gum or guar gum

1. Place 1 cup of the water, cashews, and garlic into the blender and process until the cashews are broken down. If using a high-powered blender, you can place all the ingredients into the blender at once.

2. Add the remaining ingredients and process until thoroughly incorporated and the dressing is smooth and creamy. Use a funnel to transfer the dressing into a narrow-neck bottle for easier pouring.

3. Use immediately or chill until ready to use. Shake well before using. Refrigerated, the dressing will keep for up to 10 days.

Variation:
Substitute macadamias or pine nuts for the cashews

Share this: Tell Friends
Facebook Twitter Email Print More

BRAZIL NUTS: THE DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE OF THE NUT WORLD

Posted by Zel Allen’s nutgourmet on April 30, 2010

For many years I’ve known that consuming one Brazil nut a day supplies the human body with its daily requirement for selenium, an important trace mineral high in antioxidants. But here’s what I recently learned that gave me a bit of a jolt. Recent studies show that while Brazil nuts have many positive attributes, they also have a hidden side that sparked researchers to express cautionary advice.

I turn to nature rather than food manufacturers to provide the most nourishing foods for human consumption. I’m also cognizant that we humans absorb our vitamins and minerals best from pure, natural foods rather than from synthetically manufactured supplements. Human nature is kind of funny, though. We often have a tendency to believe that if a small amount of a nutrient-dense food or supplement is good for us, wouldn’t gobbling down double, triple, or five times the amount be even better?

That theory works well for some foods, like dark leafy greens, but it doesn’t apply across the board. That mindset is especially problematic when it comes to Brazil nuts.
The good news
On the positive side, Brazil nuts, like all nuts, are highly nutritious and densely packed with minerals like calcium, copper, iron, magnesium, manganese, potassium, and zinc. Brazil nuts also possess trace amounts of thiamine, riboflavin, and niacin in the B vitamin family, along with healthy levels of folate and vitamin E. Clearly, these nuts are remarkably nutritious.

Brazil nuts stand apart from all other nuts with their exceptionally high levels of selenium. The Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) for selenium for adults 19 years and up is 55 micrograms a day. According to the USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, one Brazil nut delivers 95.8 micrograms of selenium, well over the daily requirement for the mineral.

In comparison, other nuts do not even come close to measuring up. Pine nuts contain the least selenium, registering only 0.2 micrograms for one ounce, while cashews weigh in with 5.6 micrograms per ounce, the highest quantity after Brazil nuts.

A randomized controlled study conducted at the University of Otago in New Zealand found that consuming two Brazil nuts daily is as effective in boosting selenium levels in the blood as taking selenomethionine, a synthetic selenium supplement. The group that ate two Brazil nuts a day also measured higher in antioxidant levels than those taking the supplement. Selenium, required only in small amounts, helps the body to produce antioxidant enzymes that protect the cells from free radical damage. Study authors also found that those with adequate levels of selenium in the blood have a reduced risk for breast and prostate cancer.

A double-blind, placebo-controlled study, known as the Nutritional Prevention of Cancer trial noted that in populations where selenium consumption was low, there was a rise in the incidence of cancer. The long-term trial involving 1312 individuals found supplementation with selenium reduced the total cancer incidence by 48% to 63%, especially prostate, colorectal, and lung cancer. Generally, the dietary selenium levels in the U.S. population are considered good. The trial was conducted where dietary levels were poor. Considering the results of the study conducted at the University of Otago, two Brazil nuts a day may have been equally as effective in this population as the selenium supplement.

Selenium is found in the soil where plant foods can absorb it through their root systems. Other plant-based foods high in natural selenium include most nuts, whole grains like corn, wheat, oats, and rice, along with foods of the legume family, including soybeans.

The bad news
In spite of their many positive qualities, Brazil nuts might be considered the bad boys of the nut family. Because Brazil nuts have an exceptionally high concentration of phytic acid, measuring 2% to 6% in their hulls, they might interfere with the absorption of some nutrients like iron, zinc, calcium, and magnesium. While their monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats may be beneficial in lowering cholesterol when ingested in small quantities, Brazil nuts high level of saturated fat (25%) could possibly raise cholesterol levels if the nuts are consumed in large quantities.

Overdosing on selenium can cause a toxic condition known as selenosis, leaving patients with a host of nasty symptoms like hair loss, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, sloughing of the fingernails, fatigue, irritability, and nerve damage. Less common are cirrhosis of the liver and kidney failure.

While a 12-week study of 60 volunteers published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, February 2008, found that study participants consuming two Brazil nuts a day had higher levels of selenium compared with those consuming a 100-microgram supplement or taking a placebo, the research concluded with a cautionary message.
Professor Christine Thomson, Department of Human Nutrition University of Otago, says, “People should be careful to limit themselves to no more than a few Brazil nuts per day, otherwise selenium could potentially accumulate to toxic levels in body tissues. Also, as the nuts can contain relatively high amounts of the elements barium and thorium, people should avoid eating too many as it is still unclear what intake of these elements might be harmful.”

Another study, prompted by the UK National Diet and Nutrition Survey, was conducted because of concern that the average selenium consumption in the UK is far below the recommended levels of 75 micrograms per day for men and 60 micrograms for women.

Several studies have shown an association of high levels of selenium in the blood and increased risk of type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol, and risk of heart disease. Researchers at the Warwick Medical School in Coventry, England, conducted an observational study involving 1,042 individuals, aged 19 to 64, to measure how selenium levels in the blood compared to their blood cholesterol status. In this UK National Diet and Nutrition Survey conducted 2000 to 2001, participants’ blood selenium was measured, and they were asked specific lifestyle questions about diet and alcohol consumption.

The findings revealed that participants with 1.20 micromols (about 94 micrograms) of selenium in the blood showed an average 8 percent rise in total cholesterol and a 10 percent rise in LDL cholesterol, the bad cholesterol associated with heart disease. Study authors noted that while these results raise concerns, they were unable to show positively that increased selenium levels in the blood were the cause of the jump in cholesterol levels or whether it was due to other factors. Those individuals who tested in the upper levels of selenium in the blood revealed they were regularly taking selenium supplements.

Lead author Dr. Saverio Stranges says, “The cholesterol increases we have identified may have important implications for public health. In fact, such a difference could translate into a large number of premature deaths from coronary heart disease.” Dr. Stranges expressed further concern, “We believe that the widespread use of selenium supplements, or of any other strategy that artificially increases selenium status above the level required, is unwarranted at the present time. Further research is needed to examine the full range of health effects of increased selenium, whether beneficial or detrimental.”

Study authors also examined the levels of the antioxidant glutathione peroxidase and found that those with the higher levels of selenium in their blood had an 8 to 10 percent increase in total cholesterol.

When published studies revealed that selenium may be able to fight off cancer, the news sparked interest in the mineral and created a demand for the supplements. However, there still remains no definitive evidence that the antioxidants in selenium can prevent such diseases.

While a handful-a-day of most nuts is beneficial in raising antioxidant levels and effective in lowering total and LDL cholesterol levels, the handful-a-day mantra is off the table for Brazil nuts. Stick with the recommended quantity of one or two Brazil nuts per day. A whole handful of the nuts could easily boost one’s blood selenium to unhealthy levels.

As much as I love nuts and consider them a healthy food source for my everyday diet, I have adopted the safe mantra that nut researchers conclude in study after study: A LITTLE BIT GOES A LONG WAY. In the case of Brazil nuts, eat one or two nuts a day, then, STOP.

References:


USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference
http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/search

**THE POWER OF THE FEW**

**Posted by Zel Allen’s nutgourmet on January 21, 2010**

I'm back and nutty as ever! No, I haven't abandoned my post at the NutGourmet—just took a little holiday break to spend time with family and friends and cook up a flurry of great munchies I'll share in future blog posts.

Now, I've returned with a fresh vigor and a feverish desire to share the nutty pleasures. Sometimes I bemoan the fact that nuts are not exactly dirt-cheap. Then, on the other hand, maybe that's a good thing because many of us would probably be tempted to gorge on massive amounts of them. That would be a bad thing. How bad?

What constitutes a healthy level of nut consumption? The key is to remember there is **awesome power in “just a little.”** That “just a little” means there are potent benefits in consuming as few as one to three ounces of nuts a day. Translate that to the equivalent of about one or two generous handfuls.

Some might be thinking that limiting oneself to just one or two ounces of nuts a day may actually feel like utter deprivation. In truth, that small quantity is actually achieving a perfectly healthy ideal. It never ceases to amaze me that such a small quantity packs a big wallop in knocking down high cholesterol and blood pressure and reducing the risk of coronary artery disease.

At the December 2009 meeting of the American Association for Cancer Research, attendees learned from researchers at Texas Woman’s University – Houston Center that a mere two ounces of pistachios a day boosted levels of gamma-tocopherol, a natural form of the powerful antioxidant vitamin E. The authors acknowledge higher levels of gamma-tocopherol may offer protection against certain forms of cancer, namely lung and prostate cancer.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health and Human Services update the Dietary Guidelines for Americans every five years. In 2005, the guidelines suggested incorporating 1.5 ounces of nuts such as hazelnuts into the diet several times per week. They suggest hazelnuts are a good source of vitamin E, magnesium, folate, B vitamins and minerals that may play a role in lowering blood pressure. Hazelnuts are high in beneficial monounsaturated fats and only contain 4 percent saturated fats.

Just two handfuls of walnuts a day was the catchphrase of a study looking to inhibit the growth of breast cancer tumors in mice. W. Elaine Hardman, Ph.D., professor of biochemistry at Marshall University School of Medicine in Huntington, West Virginia, gives the omega-3 fatty acids, antioxidants, and phytosterols in walnuts a thumbs up for their ability to block the progression of tumors and suggests the compounds contained in walnuts could slow down the growth of breast cancer in humans.

A study cited in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology demonstrated that just eight walnuts eaten at the end of a meal may be better than olive oil in helping to prevent damage to the delicate lining of the arteries. Walnuts were compared with olive oil in a study conducted at Barcelona’s Hospital Clinico and were found to better retain the elasticity and flexibility of the arteries when necessary to expand and increase blood flow. While many people turning to the Mediterranean diet credit the olive oil for the heart healthy focus, they miss the true hero—the little handful of nuts.
Must one conclude that nuts are truly a miracle food? No, they certainly are not. Nuts are merely one of many of the highly nutritious plant-based foods that help us to stay healthy and assist us in returning to a state of health when we’ve fallen into the pit of chronic disease.

There really are no miracle foods, though many food purveyors work hard to convince people their product is theeee one to repair all the health ills and provide a cure-all. The power of the few remains the steadfast mantra referring to all whole, plant-based foods consumed in smaller portions than Americans have become accustomed to consuming. Feasting is best saved for special occasions.

For the daily diet, the power of a few nuts along with comfortable and reasonable portions of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, and seeds brings impressive results in a surprisingly short time.

The following measurements comprise a one-ounce serving of nuts:

20 to 24 ALMONDS
6 to 8 BRAZIL NUTS
16 to 18 CASHEWS
18 to 20 FILBERTS (HAZELNUTS)
10 to 12 MEDIUM MACADAMIAS
28 SHELLED PEANUTS
18 to 20 PECAN HALVES
150 to 157 PINE NUTS (PIGNOLI)
45 to 47 PISTACHIOS
14 WALNUT HALVES
1 tablespoon PUMPKIN SEEDS
1 medium-size handful SESAME SEEDS
3 tablespoons SHELLED SUNFLOWER SEEDS

References:
Almond Board of California–http://www.almondsarein.com
California Pistachio Association–http://www.pistachios.org
The Hazelnut Council–http://www.hazelnutcouncil.org
National Pecan Shellers Association–http://www.ilovepecans.org
Peanut Advisory Board–http://www.peanutbutterlovers.com
The Peanut Institute–http://www.peanut-institute.org
Ros, Emilio. “Eating walnuts at the end of a meal may help cut the damage that fatty food can do to the arteries” Journal of the American College of Cardiology: 2006/10/10 09:38:33 GMT
The Walnut Marketing Board–http://www.walnut.org
CRANBERRIES—THE BOLD AND BEAUTIFUL MEET
WALNUTS—THE OMEGA 3 CHAMPS

If you’re like many people who are starting to plan a Thanksgiving menu, the mention of cranberries brings to
mind the standard cranberry sauce that clings to its traditional place on the Thanksgiving table. In many
households, that’s where cranberries begin and end their existence—simply as cranberry sauce. Quite often,
the convenient can of jellied cranberry sauce is the only association to cranberries people have ever had. I
know, it’s easy—just open the can and plop the deep red blob into a bowl and pass it around the table at
Thanksgiving—and maybe the canned cranberry sauce will even make a reappearance at Christmas, and
maybe not.

But quite honestly, cranberries have a treasured place in my heart because they’re the darlings of the holiday
season. In my house, they show up as Spiced Chestnut and Cranberry Nog, Tangy Cranberry Soup,
Cranberry Fruit Salad, Spiced Cranberry Salsa, Cranberry Pomegranate Salad Dressing, Cranberry Spread,
Hot Cranberry Punch, Cranberry Oat Muffins, and a ton of cranberry desserts like the one I’m sharing below.
Putting it bluntly—they’ve got pizzazz and vinegar! That’s verve and pizzazz to the less daring!

Cranberry Health Benefits
Healthwise, cranberries are packed with antioxidants. According to The Cranberry Institute, the antioxidant
activity of flavonoids and polyphenols in cranberries works to prevent heart disease by preventing oxidation in
the arteries. Those antioxidants protect the body from damaging molecules known as free radicals. Brain cells,
too, receive that same protection. Aside from their beauty and versatility, cranberries add awesome health
benefits during this winter season, when you want to chase away the sniffles, coughs, and flu.

Walnut Omega 3 Benefits
And when you pair the cranberries with nuts, like walnuts, which are another fabulous harvest delight, you get
a double benefit. Walnuts are a rich source of Omega 3 fatty acids that help to reduce inflammation in the
arteries. In turn, walnuts help to reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke because they lower cholesterol,
especially the LDL bad cholesterol.

The Omega 3 in walnuts also helps to alleviate the pain of arthritis and other inflammatory diseases. Omega 3
works to boost the function of the brain, helping people to perform on a high level, maintain good
concentration, and keep the memory sharp. Those who suffer from mild depression may find the Omega 3
fatty acids in walnuts a gentle way to bring relief.

This Thanksgiving, consider adding another dessert to the menu—one that will sit proudly beside the venerable
Pumpkin Pie and promise to send quivers of anticipation among the awaiting diners. This exquisite pie from
The Nut Gourmet cookbook is beautiful, emits a wonderful aroma, and knocks the socks off with its assertive
sweet and tart full-throttle tang.

Toss showy red cranberries, walnuts, and raisins into a pie crust and the result is a stunning dessert
that features a zippy sweet-and-tart flavor. This tantalizing treat is an ideal, easy-to-prepare, make-
ahead holiday dessert. Cranberries have arrived at the market and will be available throughout the
holiday season. Buy several packages and enjoy combining them with walnuts and sweet or dried
fruits to temper their tartness. Convenient, ready-to-eat shelled walnuts freshly harvested this fall
await your tender touch.

CRANBERRY WALNUT PIE

Yield: 6 to 8 servings

1 recipe Flaxseed Pie Crust (below)

Filling
1 cup raw walnuts, coarsely ground in a hand-crank nut mill
1 12-ounce package fresh cranberries, divided
1/2 cup golden raisins
1/2 cup organic sugar
1/2 cup light brown sugar
1/2 teaspoon almond extract
3 tablespoons cornstarch  
2 tablespoons lemon juice  
2 tablespoons water  

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees and have ready a 9-inch metal pie pan.  
2. Put the walnuts into a large mixing bowl and set aside.  
3. Sort the cranberries and discard any spoiled ones. Wash the cranberries in a strainer and drain them well.  
4. Place 1 cup of the cranberries into the food processor and pulse-chop them coarsely. Transfer them to the bowl with the walnuts and add the remaining whole cranberries.  
5. Add the raisins, organic sugar, brown sugar, and almond extract and toss well.  
6. Combine the cornstarch, lemon juice, and water in a small bowl or cup, and stir to make a runny paste. Add the paste to the cranberry mixture and stir thoroughly.  
7. Spoon the filling into the prepared pie shell and bake for 45 to 50 minutes. Cool about 30 minutes. Serve warm, or cool completely and refrigerate until ready to serve.

The Crust of the Matter  
Truthfully, pastry making is a bitch! Some people whip out a pie crust as easy as making smoothies—but not me! It has been such a challenge that for years I tended to avoid making pies at all. That is, until I came up with a few pie dough recipes I could consider friendly to the most timid of bakers. This easy pie dough is impossible to kill. Just toss the ingredients into the food processor and use your fingers to spread it into the pie pan. It’s as easy as that.

You can even use this recipe to make pre-baked pie crust when preparing a no-bake pie. Just spread it into the pie pan and cover the dough with aluminum foil, shiny side down. Weight the foil down with a thick layer of dried beans and bake at 350 degrees for 8 to 10 minutes. The process is called blind baking.

FLAXSEED PIE CRUST  
Yield: 1 9-inch pie crust

1 1/2 cups whole-wheat pastry flour  
1/2 cup flaxseed meal  
2 teaspoons organic sugar (optional)  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1/3 cup organic canola oil  
1/4 cup plus 1 tablespoon water

1. Combine the whole-wheat pastry flour, flaxseed meal, and salt in the food processor and process to distribute the dry ingredients evenly.  
2. Add the canola oil and water and pulse and process until well combined and the mixture forms dough that holds together.  
3. Spoon the dough into a 9-inch pie pan and use your fingers to spread the dough evenly over the bottom and sides of the pan.  
4. Fill the crust with the desired ingredients and bake.

Note:  
For a sweeter crust, add 2 to 3 tablespoons of organic sugar or brown sugar

WHAT SORT OF NUTTY INDULGENCES WILL 100 CALORIES BUY YOU?

Gotta hand it to California pistachio grower Paramount Farms for the savvy way they chose to show off the pistachio by comparing 100 calories of pistachios to other snack foods. Those 100 calories deliver 1.1 ounces of pistachio in the shell, a very satisfying snack that can also rave about its good fats, high fiber, and high protein in addition to its vitamin A, its host of minerals, and its healthy measure of phytosterols.

Not so satisfying is 100 calories of chocolate chip cookie—which adds up to all of 1/2 of a cookie.

Also not too impressive is 100 calories of vanilla ice cream, which amounts to a mere 3 tablespoons. Both would still leave most people craving more.

You could also get 5 Saltine crackers for 100 calories (Oh, goody!) or 1/3 of a candy bar, but you wouldn’t be benefiting from anything good for you with those choices.

That 100 calories will buy you 14 gummy bears, but all you’ll get from those are 22 carbs (and not healthy complex carbohydrates at that) and 14.5 grams of sugar—neither will these rate high on the nutrition scale.
But that quiet little 100-calorie pile of 30 pistachios in the shell has so much more to give. While the other snacks contain less than 1 gram of dietary fiber, pistachios will give you 2 grams.

One ounce of pistachios out of the shell has even more fiber—2.9 grams and 5.75 grams of protein. Imagine, only 1 ounce can supply 5.75 grams of protein. That’s a pretty powerful little pile of nuts.

**Packed with Minerals**
The mineral content is where nuts really shine and pistachios are very generous. Here’s what 1 ounce will give you:

- 30 mg of calcium
- 34 mg of magnesium
- 139 mg of phosphorus
- 291 mg of potassium

**Trace Minerals**
Even the trace minerals are abundant in pistachios:

- 1.11 mg of iron
- 0.62 mg of zinc
- 0.369 mg of copper
- 0.340 mg of manganese
- 1 mcg of fluoride
- 2 mcg of selenium

**Antioxidants**
Pistachios even want to share some of their antioxidants with you—good guys that they are (I just love them!).

- Beta carotene 71 mcg
- Lutein + zeaxanthin 398 mcg
- Gamma tocopherol 6.41 mg
- Phytoesterols 61 mg
- Campesterol 3 mg
- Beta-sitosterol 56 mg

From past experience and from observing how people behave at a party when they encounter the traditional bowl of nuts on the coffee table, I can predict pretty accurately that whoever is sitting in front of that little nut bowl is going to find those nuts very compelling. So compelling, in fact, that one little handful, about 1 1/2 ounces, will not be enough to satisfy. Within a short time, the nut bowl will be empty. That’s the typical snack addiction that catches people off guard.

So what’s the ideal quantity of nuts one ought to consider in the daily diet? Examining a number of nut studies, I noticed researchers recommend 1 to 3 ounces daily during the research trials.

I confess, that I am also a victim of the nut bowl snack addiction, but I’ve found a great way to enjoy nuts, pistachios in particular, without getting caught up in their over-consumption.

**MY SECRET IS TO PUT NUTS ON THE DAILY MENU BY INCORPORATING THEM INTO TASTY DISHES, RATHER THAN EATING THEM AS A SNACK.**

Nuts are so much more than a snack, They are wholesome, nutrient-dense food sources that can boost the healthfulness of any dish. If I include between 1/2 cup and 1 cup of nuts in a salad, soup, main dish, side dish, or even dessert, that dish will likely serve 4 to 6 people. That means that even if only 4 people feast on that dish, no one will be consuming more than 2 ounces of nuts at most.

Here’s a tasty way to enjoy pistachios, those wholesome little green wonders that bring us such pleasure:

This flavor-infused, layered vegetable casserole blanketed in a killer, thick, creamy, nut-based sauce is ideal when you need a dish to serve a large group. Like many recipes that include a blend of cooked ingredients, this one tastes even better when prepared a day ahead and reheated. If you take this delicious dish directly from the refrigerator, place it in a cold oven at 350 degrees for 15 to 20 minutes, or until warmed through.

**PISTACHIO EGGPLANT NIRVANA**

Yield: 6 to 8 servings

2 large eggplants, unpeeled, sliced 1/4-inch thick
2 large onions, thinly sliced, slices cut in half
4 medium tomatoes, sliced 1/4-inch thick
1/2 pound shiitake mushrooms, sliced, stems discarded
1 to 2 teaspoons canola oil

**Sauce**
1 1/2 cups pumpkin seeds
2/3 cup pistachios
2 1/3 cups plus 2 tablespoons vanilla flavored soymilk
1/4 cup soy sauce
4 tablespoons cornstarch
4 tablespoons water
1 tablespoon toasted sesame seeds
1 tablespoon black sesame seeds (optional)

1. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees and lightly oil 3 large jellyroll pans. Lightly oil a 9 x 13-inch baking dish and set aside

2. TO PREPARE THE VEGETABLES, arrange the eggplants and onions on two of the baking sheets. It’s perfectly all right if some of the onions overlap, but keep the eggplant slices in a single layer. Place both baking sheets in the oven and roast for 25 to 30 minutes.
3. Arrange the tomatoes on one half of the remaining pan. Toss the mushrooms with the canola oil in a medium bowl and pile them onto the baking sheet with the tomatoes. Place the tomatoes and mushrooms under the broiler, about 3-inches from the heat source. Broil them for 5 to 10 minutes, or until the mushrooms are softened.

4. When the eggplants, onions, tomatoes, and mushrooms are done, set them aside and raise the oven temperature to 400 degrees while preparing the sauce.

5. TO MAKE THE SAUCE, place the pumpkin seeds and pistachios into the food processor and process until finely ground. Transfer them to a 2-quart saucepan and add the soymilk and soy sauce. Bring the mixture to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring well. Adjust the heat as needed to avoid a messy boil-over.

6. Combine the cornstarch and water in a small bowl or cup and stir to form a smooth runny paste. Add the paste to the gently bubbling sauce, a little at a time, stirring well with a wire whip until the sauce is quite thick, about the consistency of oatmeal.

7. TO ASSEMBLE THE DISH, layer half the eggplant slices on the bottom of the prepared baking dish, followed by half the mushrooms, onions, and tomatoes.

8. Pour half the sauce over the tomatoes. Layer with the remaining eggplant slices, mushrooms, and onions and spoon the remaining sauce over the top. Top the sauce with the remaining tomatoes and sprinkle the sesame seeds over the top.

9. Bake the Pistachio Eggplant Nirvana for 25 minutes. Remove from the oven and allow it to cool for 10 minutes before cutting into squares.

For more data on the health benefits and nutritional information of pistachios, visit the Pistachio Health website.