



Nuts provide unsaturated fats, fibre, protein, vitamins, minerals and other micro-nutrients that could reduce the risk of heart diseases.

ONE SMALL STEP GO NUTS

They're utterly delicious *and* studies show they might help us live longer. Win-win!

Some of the smallest ingredients in your cupboard might just be among the most powerful. Research shows that a diet that includes eating nuts regularly – that is one handful (about 30g) five or more times a week – in combination with other diet and lifestyle choices, may increase longevity.

“Nuts are a nutrient-rich food and provide us with unsaturated fats, fibre, protein, vitamins, minerals and other micro-nutrients that could help reduce our risk of heart and circulatory diseases,” says Tracy Parker, senior dietitian at the British Heart Foundation. Studies suggest that eating nuts regularly may help reduce your risk of type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, heart attacks and other health problems. One study of 7,000 men and women at high risk of cardiovascular disease found that those who added 30g every day to their diet cut their risk of stroke in half.

There's no shying away from the fact that nuts are also calorie-dense and high in fat, however – a 30g handful of mixed nuts contains just under 200 calories, the equivalent of some chocolate bars. The good news? That shouldn't put you off enjoying them. Most nuts have high levels of 'healthy' unsaturated fats and low levels of saturated fats. (Chestnuts are an exception – they're lower in all types of fats and higher in carbohydrate than other nuts.) Swapping foods high in saturated fats for something like nuts can help reduce the 'bad' LDL cholesterol levels that can build up inside our blood vessels without negatively impacting 'good' HDL cholesterol levels. One study found that people who ate 43g of almonds a day significantly improved their 'good' cholesterol levels as well as increasing the removal of its 'bad' counterpart, compared to those who consumed a banana muffin containing the same number of calories. A study from 2017 linked cashew consumption with lower total cholesterol and LDL cholesterol.

WORDS ANITA BEAN

WAYS TO EAT MORE NUTS

Adding crunch and flavour, nuts are endlessly versatile



TOP TIP Add some crushed nuts to gratin or crumble toppings for extra texture. Walnuts or hazelnuts are particularly good. You can also use them to top fish fillets, mixed with plenty of citrus zest and herbs, then bake until golden.



OVEN-READY Roast whole almonds with stoned olives, chopped rosemary, crushed garlic, dried chilli flakes and a dash of olive oil. Just add a glass of rosé...



BUTTER IT UP

Stir a spoonful of nut butter into smoothies or chilled overnight oats. Or use almond or peanut butter in slaw dressings. Mix with a little crushed garlic, lemon juice, a dash of honey and warm water to make a double cream consistency, then season and add a little chopped chilli and finely grated ginger if liked.

What's more, studies have shown that eating nuts in moderation isn't linked to weight gain. Fascinatingly, we now know that a lot of the calories in nuts pass straight through your digestive system. That's because the fat in whole nuts is protected by the plant-cell walls, which aren't easily broken down in digestion. So when you eat them, little capsules of fat make their way through your digestive tract intact. Almonds, for example, have actually been found to provide 32% fewer calories than the label says.

It's also worth considering that the high protein, fibre and unsaturated fat content of nuts may help fill you up, preventing you from reaching for other, potentially less healthy treats. Snacking on almonds in the morning for instance was shown in one study to curb appetite later in the day. “Nuts are a great alternative to less healthy snacks such as crisps, chocolate and biscuits,” says Tracy. “Just try to avoid dry-roasted, salted, flavoured or honey-roasted nuts, which come with extra salt and sometimes sugar too.” She suggests aiming for a portion of around 30g a day, or 2 tablespoons of nut butter.

The high protein content of nuts has led some experts to suggest that they may be one of the more sustainable sources of protein. According to the EAT-Lancet report – the first full scientific review of the subject – a diet that is rich in fruit and vegetables, wholegrains and plant-based sources of protein such as nuts and seeds may be beneficial from both health and planetary perspectives.

Thankfully, there are many inviting ways to go nuts for nuts. While they're delicious on their own, you can also whizz them into dips, dressings and soups, sprinkle over salads and stir fries, or bake into all manner of treats. Check out the panel on this page for more ideas – and perhaps crack open that jar of peanut butter come breakfast. »

TOMATO & SPELT SALAD WITH WALNUT DRESSING

A gorgeous late-summer supper, with a nutty, pesto-inspired dressing. The recipe makes more of the pesto than you'll need, so keep the rest in the fridge for up to 4 days, ready to stir into cooked pasta with a handful of your favourite vegetables. Or slather over toasted bread to top with more tomatoes or some flaked hot-smoked fish.

Serves 4

Prepare 25 minutes

Cook 30 minutes

- 150g pearled spelt
- 2 shallots, finely sliced
- 2 tbsp Essential Red Wine Vinegar
- ½ tsp clear honey
- 100g walnut halves
- 100g watercress
- 1 large clove garlic, chopped
- 20g vegetarian hard cheese, finely grated
- 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 750g mixed tomatoes, halved or sliced, according to size
- 100g Essential Reduced Fat Greek Salad Cheese, drained and cubed or crumbled

1 Rinse the spelt in a sieve, then put in a medium saucepan and cover with water. Add a pinch of salt and bring to the boil over a medium heat. Cover, reduce the heat and simmer for 20 minutes until tender. Drain well and set aside to cool. Meanwhile, toss the shallots with the vinegar, honey and a small pinch of salt in a non-metallic bowl; set aside for 15 minutes to pickle.

2 Heat a frying pan over a medium-high heat and toast the walnut halves for 5-6 minutes, tossing a couple of times, until golden. Tip onto a board, then roughly crush 30g and set aside. Reserve 30g delicate watercress sprigs (leaving 70g tougher stalks and larger leaves). Put the garlic clove in a mini food processor (or use a pestle and mortar) with the 70g watercress stalks and larger leaves. Season, then whizz or crush until roughly chopped. Add the remaining 70g toasted walnuts and the grated cheese with the oil, then whizz or crush again to make a rough pesto. Put ½ this pesto in a sealed jar in the fridge, ready to use on pasta or in sandwiches over the following 4 days.

3 Put the remaining pesto in a small bowl and add the drained vinegar from the shallots with 2-3 tbsp warm water to make a thick dressing; season if needed. To serve, gently toss the spelt and tomatoes together on a platter with the reserved watercress sprigs and the pickled shallots. Add ½ the pesto dressing and toss through again. Spoon the remaining pesto dressing over, finishing with the salad cheese and reserved crushed walnuts.



Source of omega 3

✓ **Per serving** 2038kJ/489kcal/27g fat/5.8g saturated fat/36g carbs/9.6g sugars/11g fibre/19g protein/0.7g salt/1.9g omega 3 »



The walnutty dressing on this colourful grain salad contributes to your levels of omega 3.



Everyday

Nuts are a source of protein, which is essential for muscle growth and repair.

PECAN, CHERRY & HONEY OAT BARS

These no-bake bars use less butter and refined sugar than many other oaty treats, thanks to the smart addition of apple sauce – it both sweetens and binds the mixture together.

Makes 12 bars

Prepare 15 minutes
+ chilling

Cook 15 minutes

- 85g pecan nuts
- 250g jumbo rolled oats
- 40g slightly salted butter
- 30g set honey
- 285g Bramley apple sauce
- 100g dried cherries
- 40g dark chocolate chips

1 Line the base and sides of a 20cm square cake tin with baking parchment. Put a frying pan over a medium-high heat, add the pecans and toast for 4-5 minutes, tossing every so often, until lightly toasted. Tip onto a board to cool, then roughly chop. Add the oats to the pan and toast over a medium-high heat for 6-8 minutes, tossing the pan often, until golden and fragrant. Tip into a bowl and set aside.

2 Put the butter, honey and apple sauce in a medium saucepan set over a low heat. Warm through to melt the butter, then remove from the heat and stir in the toasted oats to coat in the butter mixture. Lastly, fold in the toasted pecans, dried cherries and chocolate chips. Immediately transfer to the tin, before the chocolate chips have time to melt too much and lose their shape.

3 Press down very firmly all over with the back of a spoon, making sure the surface is uniformly flat. Cover and chill for at least 3 hours or overnight, then turn out onto a board and cut into 12 bars. The bars are best eaten within a day or so but can be stored in an airtight container in the fridge for up to 4 days.



Source of fibre

✓ **Per bar** 938kJ/224kcal/10g fat/3.1g saturated fat/28g carbs/13g sugars/
2.9g fibre/3.6g protein/0.1g salt

COOK'S TIP

IF YOU HAVE THE OVEN ON ALREADY FOR ANOTHER DISH, USE IT TO TOAST THE PECANS FOR 4-5 MINUTES.