

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

December 20, 2015

“Nuts and Your Health”

Nuts are a great snack food. They're inexpensive, easy to store and easy to pack when you're on the go. A new 2015 study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* found that consuming tree nuts, such as walnuts, may lower the risk of heart disease. The dose of nuts varied from 5 to 100g/day. The systematic review and meta-analysis of 61 controlled trials, found that consuming tree nuts lowers total cholesterol, triglycerides, LDL ("bad") cholesterol, and ApoB, the primary protein found in LDL cholesterol. These are key factors that are used to evaluate a person's risk of cardiovascular disease. Experts contend that tree nuts contain important nutrients such as unsaturated fats, protein, vitamins and minerals. Walnuts are the only nut that provides a significant amount (2.5 grams per one ounce serving) of alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), the plant-based form of omega-3s. Researchers also found that consuming at least two servings (two ounces) per day of tree nuts, such as walnuts, has stronger effects on total cholesterol and LDL and that tree nut consumption may be particularly important for lowering the risk of heart disease in individuals with type 2 diabetes. More than two decades of research has shown that walnuts may help lower cardiovascular risk factors by decreasing "bad" cholesterol by 9-16% and diastolic blood pressure by 2-3 mmHg, as well as reducing total cholesterol, raising HDL ("good") cholesterol, reducing inflammation as measured by C-reactive protein, and improving arterial function. These factors are considered to be major contributors to heart disease risk, and reducing them may be a critical step toward a healthier heart. In addition to providing omega-3s, walnuts also deliver a convenient source of fiber (2 grams per ounce) and protein (4 grams per ounce). More importantly, three large cohort prospective studies published in *JAMA Internal Medicine*, found that a diet high in nuts is linked to lower mortality (associated with death rates cut by as much as a fifth). The Mayo Clinic also feels that almonds and other nuts help lower your cholesterol and that the type of nut you eat isn't that important, although some nuts have more heart-healthy nutrients and fats than do others. Walnuts, almonds, and hazelnuts have a lot of nutrition packed into a tiny package. If you have heart disease, eating nuts can help you more easily follow a heart-healthy diet. Remember a pun amongst epidemiologists: "good health costs peanuts." However, peanuts are not really nuts. They're legumes (like beans and peas), but they are nutritionally similar to true tree nuts and are counted as nuts in epidemiological studies as well as by most ordinary people.

In the America that I love, a heart healthy diet can make you "go nuts."

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