

NUTRITION HORIZON

Go Nuts for a Nutritious Diet and Heart Health

Date:03 Feb 2011

Summary:The findings in this analysis support those from epidemiological studies which have consistently shown that nut consumption reduces the risk of heart disease.

2/3/2011 --- The newly released 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans give consumers yet another reason to eat a handful or 1 1/2 ounces of tree nuts (including walnuts, pistachios, pine nuts, pecans, macadamias, hazelnuts, cashews, Brazils and almonds) every day.

The 2010 Dietary Guidelines recommend consuming a variety of protein sources, including nuts, along with nutrient-rich foods and healthy fats in order to help curb the rising rates of overweight and obesity in this country, and to reduce the risk of chronic disease such as heart disease. Fortunately, nuts are nutrient-rich and contain unsaturated fats (poly- and monounsaturated fats). They also provide fiber and important vitamins and minerals such as potassium and calcium key shortfall nutrients in U.S. adults. In addition, tree nuts contain a wide variety of phytochemicals, or plant compounds such as phytosterols (beta-sitosterol), carotenoids, flavonoids and proanthocyanidins, which may help protect against heart disease, the leading cause of death in the United States.

Now is the perfect time to add more nuts to your diet. Not only can they help you meet the new 2010 Dietary Guidelines, but February is American Heart Month. Last year the most comprehensive study to date on nuts and blood lipids was published in the Archives of Internal Medicine, providing more evidence that regular nut consumption can reduce the risk of coronary heart disease. The pooled analysis looked at 25 studies conducted in seven countries with 583 men and women. Those who consumed roughly 67 grams (or 2.4 ounces) of nuts per day had an average drop in total cholesterol, LDL-cholesterol, LDL/HDL ratio and total cholesterol/HDL ratio of 5.1%, 7.4%, 8.3% and 5.6% respectively. The effect of nuts was dose-related and different types of nuts had similar effects on blood lipids.

The findings in this analysis support those from epidemiological studies which have consistently shown that nut consumption reduces the risk of heart disease. In 2003 the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), based on all of the evidence, issued a qualified health claim that states: "Scientific evidence suggests but does not prove that eating 1.5 ounces per day of most nuts, as part of a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol, may reduce the risk of heart disease."

While heart disease is still the biggest area of research when it comes to nuts and health, more studies are looking at the effect of nuts in other areas including weight, satiety and diabetes. Over 170 studies were submitted to the 2010 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (the abstracts and related information can be found at www.nuthealth.org).

"All of this research continues to support the recommendation that nuts should be an important part of a healthy diet," states Maureen Ternus, M.S., R.D., Executive Director of the International Tree Nut Council Nutrition Research and Education Foundation.