



Nuts About Nuts



Halloween is just around the corner. It conjures up the images of pumpkins, fancy dress and of course trick or treats. One of the food items that often makes it into the trick or treat bags is nuts but are they a treat or do they actually have some health benefits?

Where do nuts come from?

Most nuts come from trees with a few exceptions including peanuts, which are actually classed as legumes and grown on the ground

What are the health benefits of nuts?

- 1) **Protein:** Nuts are one of the best plant sources of protein. Proteins are the building blocks of the body and are essential for growth. They have many other functions in the body including transport functions, enzymatic functions and immune functions. It is essential that we meet our protein requirements as part of a balanced diet. Nuts can especially be a good alternative source of protein for vegetarians.
- 2) **Fibre:** Nuts are also great sources of fibre. Adequate fibre is essential for bowel health and can also help in reducing cholesterol levels.
- 3) **Good Fats:** Nuts are an excellent source of monounsaturated fats and also contain some polyunsaturated fats. These are “good” fats and have been shown to lower cholesterol levels.
- 4) **Vitamins and Minerals:** Nuts are packed full of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants - Magnesium, Iron, Potassium, Selenium, Copper, B Vitamins and Vitamin E.
- 5) **Omega 3:** Nuts, particularly walnuts are good sources of omega 3 fats. Omega 3 fats are a type of polyunsaturated fat and are associated with reductions in blood clots leading to possible protection against heart disease and strokes. They are also associated with anti-inflammatory properties so can help with joints.
- 6) **Other Health Benefits:** Moderate intakes of nuts have been associated with reductions of heart disease, cancer and diabetes.

What are the issues with nuts?

- 1) **Calories:** Nuts are high in fat, therefore, high in calories. For every gram of fat you get 9 calories compared to 4 calories for every gram of carbohydrate. Overindulging in these tasty treats can lead to weight gain
- 2) **Salt:** Most of us tend to go for the salted variety when choosing nuts. Salt is associated with increasing blood pressure levels and therefore heart disease and stroke. Try to go for the unsalted varieties
- 3) **Allergies:** It is estimated that approximately 2% of the population have food allergies. Allergies to nuts tend to be very serious in nature, even fatal. It is important for anyone who



does have a nut allergy to always read the ingredient lists on foods and avoid foods if they are ever in doubt. If a pregnant woman or father of the child have a strong allergy to peanuts it is best to avoid them during pregnancy and breastfeeding. For further information on allergies please see useful websites and cookbooks at the end of this fact sheet or contact a dietitian.

- 4) **Choking risk:** Nuts can be a choking hazard for young children. It is recommended that young children should always be supervised when taking nuts and whole nuts should not be offered to your child until they are at least 5 years of age. For this reason they are not really suitable for the trick or treat bags

How do I incorporate them into my diet?

- Nuts can liven up a salad, add crunch to pasta and texture to a stir fry when used in place of meat
- Add chopped nuts to your favourite breakfast cereal or pancake, waffle, cookie, cake, quick bread or muffin batters.
- Liven up some natural yoghurt with some chopped nuts and fruit
- Have a handful of nuts as a healthy snack instead of a biscuit or a bar

How much should I have?

As little as 1oz (28g) of nuts per day can provide nutritional benefits and shouldn't harm the waist line. Here is a list of some of the common nuts and nutritional content per ounce

Nut	Fat (g)	Calories
Almonds	15	171
Brazil Nuts	19	190
Cashews	13	163
Hazel Nuts	18	182
Peanuts	14	164
Pine nuts	19	192
Walnuts	19	192
Pecan Nuts	19	192
Pistachio Nuts	14	164



Useful websites for information on Allergies

- Irish Anaphylaxis Campaign, PO Box 542, Ballinlough, Cork. Tel. 0818 300238.
www.irishanaphylaxis.org
- Allergy UK, 3 White Oak Square, London Road, Swanley, Kent, BR8 7AG, UK
www.allergyuk.org
- www.actagainstallergy.ie
- www.ctpa.co.uk
- www.kidsaware.co.uk
- www.medic-alert.co.uk
- www.yellowcross.co.uk
- www.trendyholders.com
- www.allergyinschools.org.uk
- www.anaphylaxis.org.uk
- www.cateringforallergy.org.uk

Allergy Cookbooks

- The Allergy Self-Help Cookbook, by Marjorie Hurt Jones
- The All Natural Allergy Cookbook, by Jeanne Marie Martin
- What's to Eat? The Milk-Free, Egg-Free, Nut-Free Food Allergy Cookbook by Linda Marienhoff Coss