

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Peanuts for Your Health

Peanuts have been part of our cultural history for generations. From the hymn to summer baseball games that asks “Buy me some peanuts and crackerjacks...” to George Washington Carver researching new uses for the nuts and the vines, to warm crock pots of salty boiled peanuts at roadside stands and corner convenience stores, peanuts have been part of American life, and especially Southern American life, for years. But for the weight-conscious there’s been that cloud of ‘too much fat, too many calories’ hanging over the beloved nut.

Now the medical evidence is growing that peanuts have enough health benefits to outweigh the calories. Actually, some of the benefits come from the fat, or more precisely the kind of fats. Almost all the fat in peanuts is mono and poly unsaturated. If you’re going to eat oily foods, those are the good kinds of fat to eat. Some peanut oils are essential fats, kinds we need but can’t make ourselves. Peanuts also carry a decent amount of vitamin E in their fat.

Besides the fat, peanuts are good sources of potassium, a mineral important for balancing our blood pressure and keeping our arteries and heart healthy. It’s one that most of us do not get enough of in our typical American diet. About 3 ounces, or a little over a quarter of a cup, gives us 658 mg of potassium.

Peanuts are also a decent source of vegetable protein. Since the current MyPyramid food recommendations include using a variety of protein sources, peanuts are one that can be substituted for animal protein in a balanced diet. Peanuts, like

beans, are a source of protein that also provides fiber. Animal products have no fiber. The recommendations are that we include an ounce of nuts in our diet 5 days a week. That's about 2 tablespoonfuls, or as much as you can put in one of those little square mint tins.

So, just how helpful are peanuts? Here are a few of the recent statistics. Male doctors, 39,000 of them were followed for years. Those who ate at least 1 serving of peanuts or peanut butter a day had 21%, or almost 1 quarter the risk, of coronary heart disease. Female nurses who substituted peanut butter or nuts for saturated fat in their diets lowered their risk by a full 25%. The average is between 25 and 50% lower risk for people who eat 1 to 2 ounces of nuts or peanuts 5 days a week.

Another common disease is diabetes. The same study of female nurses found that those who ate the most peanuts and other nuts had a 27% lower rate of diabetes. Weight gain is a concern too. A two year study of almost 9000 adults found that those who ate nuts at least twice a week either gained no weight or gained less, by about 10 pounds, than those who did not eat nuts. Part of this is probably due to the fact that nuts with their high oil and protein content help us to feel full faster. So we eat less.

Higher fiber intake is connected to lower risk of cholesterol and arterial problems as well as colon and rectal cancers. Fiber makes our stool material bigger and softer, so it goes through and out faster and easier. On the way, fiber attaches itself to bile acids and carries them along out. Some kinds of bile acids are cancer promoters. Getting rid of them faster lowers our risk of colon cancers. But we need bile acids to digest fats, so our body makes more bile acid. It makes them from cholesterol. The end result is that our blood cholesterol levels go down.

So, the next time you reach for a snack at the convenience store, reach for a bag

of peanuts. If you're at home and a plain apple or banana just doesn't interest you, top slices of the fruit with dabs of peanut butter. When you're mixing a breakfast smoothie, add a tablespoon or 2 of peanut butter to the blender. And here's a quick peanut butter salad dressing. Slice some rotisserie chicken onto a big bowl of ready to eat salad greens, add the dressing, and dinner is on the table!

Peanut Butter Salad Dressing

2 tsp peanut oil	2 tsp sesame oil (or use more peanut oil)
1/4 C creamy peanut butter	1/4 cup rice vinegar
juice of 1 lime	1 1/2 Tbsp soy sauce
1 Tbsp honey	1 clove garlic
1 Tbsp chunk fresh ginger (or 1 tsp ground ginger)	1 tsp chili powder

Combine all ingredients in blender and blend until smooth. Refrigerate until ready to use. Garnish salad with 1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro and sliced green onions just before serving for a real Chinese flavor. Serves 4.

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