

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Walnut Wisdom

As the calendar heads into the holiday season, and particularly the holiday *baking* season, our walnut consumption goes up. For many families having walnuts around the house is traditional. And why not? It's the end of a fresh harvest season. Nuts can be a very healthy snack. Shelling walnuts for baking used to be a family activity. Now when we want to buy a bag of shelled nuts, we only have to decide if we want walnut halves, or pieces, or more finely chopped bits. It's a lot easier than cracking those hard shells and picking all the little pieces out!

In addition to making it easy, we now have health reasons to be eating walnuts. One health characteristic can be both a bad and a good thing. On the bad side like most other nuts, walnuts have a lot of fat. That means a lot of calories. A quarter cup of walnut pieces has 190 calories. On the good side, most of that fat is polyunsaturated oil, the good kind. It won't hurt our hearts or get turned into cholesterol by our liver. In fact, the FDA allows walnut packages to carry a health claim that in a healthy diet, with a healthy level of calories, eating walnuts might reduce our risks of heart disease. We do have to eat less of something else to keep our total calories down. Otherwise we'll be gaining weight that's not good for our hearts.

The other good thing about walnut oil is that it has a lot of omega-3 fat. However, there are three kinds of omega-3s. Two are most connected to lower heart risk. The third helps to reduce or limit inflammation. Walnut omega-3s are the third kind. Our bodies do a very poor job of changing one kind into the other. So we don't

get the most protection from this omega-3, but it is helpful. But this omega-3 fat along with all the unsaturated fats, can help protect our arteries and seem to keep cholesterol from sticking to them.

Walnuts have other kinds of antioxidants besides omega-3 though. They are a good source of selenium, which helps to keep mercury from damaging our brains. They have a lot of vitamin E, another good internal antioxidant. Only a few fruits have more vitamin E than walnuts. Phenolic antioxidants are another kind of protection. Walnuts have more of these than either chocolate or red wine!

Walnuts also have several grams of protein in an ounce, and since they have very little carbohydrate they can be an excellent snack or garnish for people with diabetes. One study found that in people with diabetes, substituting walnuts for other snacks of equal calories could reduce bad cholesterol by almost 10%.

If you decide to go out and buy a couple bags of walnuts, store them right to keep the good flavor. They will turn rancid if you're not careful. Walnuts stay happy when you keep them in an airtight container in a cool place. The refrigerator is the best place for short storage, something under month. If you find a great buy and get enough to last longer than that, put them in the freezer. If there's not enough room there, keep them as cool as possible and in the dark. Of course, hiding them in a freezer can be a good way to control how much you eat at one time too! As many walnuts as you can put in one of those little mint tins is considered a 1 ounce serving, so be careful!

How should you use them? Any way you like the crunch of nuts is good. Walnuts pair very well with apples, pears and most fruits in salad, on pancakes, in breads and baked goods. Walnuts go well with many kinds of cheese, for snacks or on

salads. Walnuts can add crunch to stir-fry dishes, to rice and pasta, or as a coating for baked fish or chicken. Try a few in any of these dishes, or whatever else sounds good.

Here's a slightly different flavor for walnuts. This is a party or snack mix, or you can carry a little bag for an afternoon snack. But it has an interesting Indian flavor! Use as hot or mild a curry paste as your family enjoys.

Curried Nut Mix

2 Tbsp margarine	2 tsp curry paste (not powder)
1 tsp white sugar	2 cups walnut halves
2 cups multigrain pretzel nuggets	1 cup sesame sticks
1 cup unsalted soy nuts	1 cup roasted peas (optional)

Preheat oven to 250°F. Melt margarine, stir in curry paste and sugar until mixed. Stir in nuts until coated. Stir in pretzels until coated. Stir in sesame sticks, then soy nuts and peas. Spread on baking sheet with a rim and bake about 1 hour, stirring every 15 min. Walnuts should be golden and mixture toasted. Cool, store in airtight container up to 5 days. Makes 5 cups.