

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Yes, you might feel like you're going nuts, getting the children ready to start school, keeping up with work, looking for the best deals on purchases. But other than just saying 'we're going nuts', we might be better off if we added some nuts to our diets. Adding walnuts in particular might be a big help. The trick of course is to add the walnuts without adding too many extra calories. But here's what the benefits might be.

In 2004 the FDA agreed that the evidence for walnuts' benefits was strong enough that they allowed a "may reduce the risk of coronary heart disease" statement on food labels. Even though walnuts do have omega-3 fats, those are not likely to be the reason for heart health. The kind of omega-3s in walnuts, just like those in flaxseed, are not the kind that help our hearts. And our body does a very poor job of changing these plant omega-3s to the really good kinds found in fish.

Nevertheless, the fat in walnuts is polyunsaturated, a healthy kind. Plus, walnuts have antioxidants which help fight the inflammation that seems to go before heart and artery disease. Walnuts also have phytosterols. These are things made by plants (that's the phyto- part) that look a lot like cholesterol (the -sterol part). These are usually pretty good for us because when we eat them our bodies don't absorb as much cholesterol. They also might prevent cholesterol from doing some of the unhealthy things it does in the body. The phytosterols might have more to do with heart health than the omega-3s.

Recent research compared diets with various amounts of walnuts to a diet with salmon and to one with neither fish or nuts. They looked at how much good (HDL) and bad (LDL) cholesterol was in the blood of the volunteers eating the diets. The winner: walnuts! That diet lowered cholesterol ratios more than the salmon diet did.

Other recent research, done in rats not people, found that diets with walnuts helped old rats keep their balance and remember where things were better than diets without nuts. We might remember where the car keys are! Whether our brains respond to nuts the same way rats' do, who knows? And, too much walnut in the diet actually hurt the rats' memory. So more is not better! The amount that helped the most was about the same as one ounce of walnuts a day for an average human diet.

Studies in mice likely to get breast cancer found that adding walnuts to their diets helped prevent breast cancers. Those who were given walnuts got half as many cancers as those who didn't eat walnuts. And the cancers that did develop grew very slowly. The antioxidants, omega-3s and phytosterols could all be part of the cancer protection plan of walnuts.

None of these are guarantees that walnuts will keep us healthy, stay tuned for new research. In the meantime, we have to eat less of something else to squeeze nutritious high calorie walnuts into our diets. One ounce, the amount you can put in one of those little square mint tins, has 278 calories or about the same as 2 regular hot dogs. It's hard to limit the calories if you use walnuts as the main ingredient in a meal, but walnuts are a great addition to many dishes from breakfast to dinner to dessert.

Shelled nuts should be crisp, not flabby. Toast them lightly to bring out the best flavor. Spread out on a cookie sheet in a 160-170° F oven for 15 to 20 minutes. Don't

try to speed it up with a higher temperature because that can break down those healthy fats. Keep fresh nuts in the refrigerator, or freezer for longer term storage.

Here's a nutty way to dress up our plentiful zucchini or summer squash. This has an Oriental flair, but you could go Italian instead of the soy and ginger if you prefer.

Nutty Zucchini

1 1/2 Tbsp vegetable oil	1 unpeeled garlic clove
1 tsp grated or 1/2 tsp ground ginger	1/2 C coarsely chopped walnuts
6 small zucchini, cut in 1/4 inch slices	2 tsp low sodium soy sauce

Heat oil in medium skillet. Add zucchini and saute until tender but firm, stirring or shaking frequently. Add garlic and ginger and cook for 1 minute. Remove garlic clove. Stir 3 Tbsp walnuts into zucchini and cook until nuts are hot and fragrant. Season with soy sauce. Transfer to serving dish and sprinkle remaining nuts over top. Garnish with chopped fresh cilantro if desired. Serves 6.

(Adapted from *Simply Florida*, the cookbook of the Fl. Extension Service)

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