

NUTRITION



F A C T S H E E T

Almonds: A Handful Can Make a Difference

A little goes a long way when it comes to almonds, the most nutrient-dense nut ounce-for-ounce. A one-ounce serving of almonds (about 23) is an excellent source of vitamin E and magnesium, a good source of protein and fiber, and offers potassium, calcium, phosphorus, iron, and monounsaturated fat, giving you a lot of nutritional bang for only 160 calories.

Eating a handful of almonds a day can help you meet the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005* and MyPyramid food guidance system recommendations for cutting down on saturated fat, while increasing consumption of essential nutrients like fiber, protein and vitamin E.

What do the vitamins and nutrients in almonds do?

Vitamin E is an important antioxidant that helps protect cells from everyday damage, while magnesium helps keep bones strong. Fiber is beneficial for the digestive system and heart health. Protein is an important building block of bones, muscles, hair, nails and skin and helps repair tissues in the body. The monounsaturated fats found in almonds are the natural "good fats" that may help lower cholesterol and keep your heart healthy when substituted for saturated fat in the diet.

Almonds: one small step to heart health

Previous studies have shown that almonds play an important role in a heart-healthy lifestyle. According to research from the University of Toronto, eating a specific combination of heart-healthy foods can help reduce LDL (bad) cholesterol levels as much as certain cholesterol-lowering drugs. This special diet, called the Portfolio Eating Plan includes almonds, oatmeal, lean meats and fish. Patients who followed this diet the most closely lowered their cholesterol by more

than 20 percent. Experts agree that diet and exercise are the first steps in reducing high cholesterol levels.

Weighing in on almonds

Additionally, further studies have shown that almonds, as part of a healthy lifestyle, can help maintain a healthy cholesterol level without causing weight gain. Researchers from Purdue University and Queens University in Belfast asked people to add two-ounces of almonds to their daily diet. After ten weeks, the subjects did not gain weight or increase their body fat. Also, participants did not increase the amount of food they were eating—suggesting that almonds naturally replaced other foods in the diet and that regularly consuming almonds does not cause weight gain. The participants also increased their intake of vitamin E and magnesium, showing that almonds can enhance the diet and contribute to overall health.

Almonds can also help manage blood sugar and insulin levels, which are often connected to feelings of hunger. Experts think that the fiber, protein and crunch of almonds are satisfying and help people feel fuller longer.

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Correcting portion distortion: It's all in your hand

But how many almonds should you eat, and how do you measure the proper serving? Unlike foods such as apples or bananas, almonds don't come in a pre-portioned package. A good degree of "portion distortion" exists about the proper serving size. The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005* and the MyPyramid food guidance system both recommend a one-ounce portion for almonds—or about 23.

Some Suggestions on How to Measure Your Daily Serving of Almonds:

- A handful
- A $\frac{1}{4}$ measuring cup
- An empty mint tin
- A small, one-ounce spice bottle
- Two wells of an ice-cube tray

Remember, for a healthy eating plate:

- Emphasize fruits, vegetables, whole grains and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products.
- Include lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs and nuts.
- Keep saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt (sodium) and added sugars low.

Give your body the balanced nutrition it needs by eating a variety of nutrient-packed foods every day. Just be sure to stay within your daily calorie needs.

POWER PACKED VEGETABLES WITH ROASTED ALMONDS

This dish is a quick and easy way to get the powerful health benefits of almonds and veggies.

Ingredients:

- 1 small red bell pepper
- 1 small orange or yellow bell pepper
- 1 head bok choy
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sliced almonds
- 3 teaspoons olive oil, divided
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice

Directions:

Trim bell peppers, remove seeds, and slice thinly. Trim both ends of bok choy, slice thinly, and place in a large bowl of cold water for a few minutes to remove any grit. Remove by handfuls and immerse again in a fresh bowl of cold water. Drain in a colander.

Preheat oven to 350°F. Place almonds on a baking sheet and roast for 10 minutes, tossing once or twice. Meanwhile, heat 2 teaspoons olive oil in a large sauté pan or wok. Add pepper and sauté on medium-high heat for 3 minutes. Stir in garlic and continue to sauté for 3 more minutes. Remove and set aside in a medium-sized bowl.

Heat remaining 1 teaspoon olive oil in pan. Add washed bok choy and sauté for a minute. Add lemon juice and cover pan, letting bok choy wilt. Return peppers to pan, add roasted almonds, and stir gently before serving.

Nutritional analysis:

73 calories; 4.6 g fat; 0.5 g saturated fat; 2.9 g monounsaturated fat; 0.8 g polyunsaturated fat; 5 g protein; 0 mg cholesterol; 7 g carbohydrates; 2 g fiber; 1.5 mg vitamin E.

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