

*ICCN*

## Cardiovascular health

**Nuts for Cardiovascular Protection**

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Studies of diet and heart disease have shown beneficial effects of vegetarian and Mediterranean dietary patterns. Recent studies have further examined which particular foods contained in these diets may be responsible for the cardioprotective effect observed in epidemiological studies. In vegetarian populations it appears that nuts may be exerting the strongest protective effect. This was an unexpected finding since it was anticipated that the absence of meat eating would be the dominant factor. When other population groups were examined similar findings became apparent demonstrating a strong cardioprotective effect from nut ingestion approaching the level of effect seen with the use of lipid lowering medication. It has been estimated that 1oz of daily nut ingestion may reduce the risk of fatal CHD by 45% when substituted for saturated fat and by 30% when substituted for carbohydrate intake. Studies to date have not identified which particular nuts may be of most benefit although it is possible to speculate that the lipid profile of walnuts may confer the most advantage. Efforts to identify possible mechanisms whereby nuts may be exerting their cardioprotection have led to feeding trials with a wide variety of nuts. These have consistently shown that regular nut consumption can result in a 10% reduction in LDL-C within a few weeks. Other known properties of nuts that have been considered to be of possible benefit include high levels of arginine, vitamin E, folate, fibre, potassium, magnesium, tannins and polyphenols. Although nuts contain approximately 80% fat the nut feeding trials have not shown any associated weight gain in those ingesting nuts suggesting the addition of nuts in the diet may have a satiating effect. It is concluded that the daily ingestion of a small quantity of nuts may be one of the most acceptable lifestyle interventions for the prevention of coronary heart disease.

**Nuts: The American Position**

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The main concern with nuts in our diet relates to fat content, calories consumed, and allergic risk. I will discuss these issues, as well as, focus on the nutrient content of nuts. The role of nuts in the American diet, as recommended by the American Heart Association, American Dietetic Association, and the National Cholesterol Education Committee, will be reviewed. I will also suggest some general rules for the use of nuts in our diet and conclude with the American position on nuts, as I see it to be.

**References**

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