

Food *for* Thought

The Healthy Choice



Nutritional News

Legumes, Seeds and Nuts

Inexpensive and versatile, these foods are nutritional gems! Legumes, seeds and nuts are all valuable sources of protein as well as being low in saturated fat, sodium and also cholesterol free. They are also good sources of fiber, complex carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals including thiamine (B₁) riboflavin (B₂), niacin (B₃), folate, calcium, potassium, iron and phosphorus.

The term “legume” includes a huge range of peas, beans, and lentils. They are important foods and have the advantage over animal proteins of being both inexpensive and versatile in how they are cooked, as well as being packed with nutrients. Due to their high soluble-fiber content, legumes are believed to help reduce blood cholesterol. They also have a very low glycemic index, which means they are absorbed relatively slowly into the blood stream and do not cause sudden increases in glucose blood levels. This makes this group of foods particularly beneficial for anyone who has diabetes and those at risk of developing this disease, such as people who are over weight or have a family history of diabetes.

Protein in seeds and nuts

Seeds are the embryo and food supply of new plants, whereas nuts are dried tree fruits, which are contained within hard shells. Both seeds and nuts contain 10-25 percent protein and they are high in mono and polyunsaturated fat. They are good sources of fiber, vitamins; thiamine (B₁), riboflavin (B₂) and E and the minerals; calcium, phosphorus, potassium and iron.

Research shows that people who regularly eat nuts have a decreased risk of developing cardiovascular disease and diabetes. There are a number of possible explanations, in addition to the known benefits of unsaturated fat on cholesterol levels. For example, nuts are rich in arginine, an amino acid that boosts nitric oxide. This compound relaxes the blood vessels and eases blood flow as well as making blood less likely to form clots.

Complementary proteins

Since the protein obtained from most plants lacks one or more of the amino acids that the body needs (essential amino acids), these sources of protein must be combined with a complementary plant-derived food or soybean product in order to form a complete protein. This is not an issue when animal proteins are also included in the diet, but it is important for vegetarians who eliminate most animal products from their diets.

What is a serving?

Two to three servings daily form the protein group are recommended. Legumes, seeds and nuts are good sources of protein and offer an alternative to red meat and dairy. The servings below are for cooked legumes and raw nuts and seeds.

- ½ cup soybeans
- ½ cup chickpeas
- 3 T sunflower seeds
- 3 T alfalfa seeds
- 3 T flaxseeds
- 3 T macadamia
- 3 T pistachios
- 3 T cashew nuts
- ½ cup lentils
- ½ cup kidney beans
- 3 T sesame seeds
- 3 T pumpkin seeds
- 3 T almonds
- 3 T Brazil nuts
- 3 T hazelnuts

Ways of getting seeds in your diet

Seeds are ideal for snacking. They are nutritious, portable and low in saturated fat. However, if you are trying to reduce the amount of fat in your diet, you should keep in mind that seeds are high in total fat and calories.

Pumpkin seeds Rich in protein, iron, zinc, and phosphorus, these seeds can be eaten raw or cooked.

Sesame seeds A good source of protein and calcium, sesame seeds also contain iron and niacin (B₃). Mixed with sea salt, ground sesame seeds make a delicious condiment. You can also sprinkle the seeds over stir-frys.

Sunflower seeds These are rich in the minerals potassium and phosphorus and also contain protein, iron and calcium. They make a great topping for salads

Flaxseeds A good source of fiber and omega-3 fatty acids, crushed flaxseeds can be added to smoothies and baked goods. They are often used in energy bars.

Which nuts are the best?

Nuts are 10-25 percent protein, high in mono and polyunsaturated fats and a good source of dietary fiber and certain vitamins and minerals. Nuts are cholesterol free, but because all nuts are high in fat and often salted, they should be eaten in moderation.

Almonds High in monounsaturated fat, almonds are also a good source of protein, riboflavin (B₂), vitamin E, calcium, iron and zinc.

Brazil nuts Rich in protein, iron, calcium and zinc, brazil nuts also contain the highest natural source of selenium. One nut exceeds the Daily Recommended Intake.

Cashews High in fat(although lower than almonds, peanuts, pecans and walnuts), cashews contain essential fatty acids, B vitamins, fiber, protein, carbohydrate, iron and zinc.

Chestnuts Containing less fat than most other nuts, chestnuts do have microminerals and potassium, but are not a good source of protein.

Hazelnuts (filberts) Contain fiber, calcium, magnesium and vitamin E, these are good source of protein.

Peanuts Technically a legume, these contain more protein than most nuts (20-30%) and are a good sources of fiber, folate and vitamins.

Pecans These contain fiber, vitamin A and thiamine (B₁) iron, calcium, copper, magnesium, potassium and phosphorus. Pecans are also high in mono and polyunsaturated fats.

Pine nuts The small edible seeds of pine trees. Pine nuts are high in protein, calcium and magnesium.

Pistachios A very rich source of potassium, they contain calcium, magnesium, iron, fiber and protein as well as vitamin A and folate.

Walnuts Rich in vitamins, especially folate and magnesium, potassium, iron and zinc, these are also high in antioxidants and omega-3 fatty acids.

Facts about soybeans

Soybeans supply nearly as many essential amino acids as animal proteins. They contain twice as much protein as other legumes and are a good source of vitamin A, the B vitamins and the minerals calcium, phosphorus, potassium, and iron. They also contain large amounts of isoflavones, which are phytochemicals with beneficial health effects. Soybeans are processed into a wide variety of products including...

Soy milk Available in regular, low-fat and flavored varieties

Tofu Also known as soybean curd, this can be used in smoothies, stir-fry dishes, soups and burgers.

Tempeh A chunky cake with a chewy texture and nutty flavor. It can be used instead of ground beef or chicken in a variety of recipes.

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