

## FINDING THE TOP SEEDS

BY JAYNE HURLEY & BONNIE LIEBMAN

**i**n a quandary over nuts? Some articles, ads, and company Web sites make it sound like nuts are the key to a healthy heart and a long life. Others promise that eating nuts won't make you fat. And labels boast about omega-6 fats, fibre, iron, sea salt, or zero trans fat.

Nuts (and seeds) are good foods. Most are rich in unsaturated fats, magnesium, and copper, with smaller amounts of protein, fibre, and iron. But they're also high in calories—around 300 in every 50-gram serving (a third of a cup).

Here's what to believe about nuts...and what claims to take with a grain of salt.

Information compiled by Namita Davis in Toronto.

### Heart Smart

"Eat Nuts. Live Longer," says the poster on the Heart & Stroke Foundation's Web site. "Almonds, walnuts and pecans—just a few kinds of nuts that improve heart health. Studies show a small handful of unsalted nuts can help lower your risk of heart disease. Next time you crave chips or cookies, grab a small handful of unsalted nuts instead."

Nuts absolutely trump chips or cookies, but are they the key to a strong heart and a longer life? Here's what we know about nuts and the heart:

**1. Nut eaters.** Men and women who eat more nuts are less likely to die of a heart attack.<sup>1,2</sup> But nut eaters are typically leaner, less likely to smoke, and more likely to exercise and take vitamins. Researchers "adjust" for those factors, but can't know for sure if something else about nut eaters explains their healthier hearts. So it's safer to rely on studies that feed people nuts to see what happens to their cholesterol.

**2. Unsaturated fats.** In the best feeding studies, LDL ("bad") cholesterol is 2 to 19 per cent lower in people when they are fed almonds, peanuts, pecans, or walnuts than when they eat a similar diet without those nuts.<sup>3</sup> Most other nuts and seeds haven't been well studied, but odds are that pistachios, hazelnuts, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, and soy nuts also lower

LDL, and that Brazil nuts, macadamias, and cashews don't (so they're not Best Bites). (See "The Nut Case," p. 14.)

**3. How much?** In most studies, researchers gave people 1 to 2 (50-gram) servings of nuts a day. It's not clear that eating less does anything. In one study on almonds, for example, 25 grams a day didn't lower LDL significantly. And keep in mind that 50 to 100 grams of nuts deliver some 300 to 600 calories.

**4. Beyond LDL.** Nuts may lower damaging triglycerides, raise HDL ("good") cholesterol, reduce inflammation, and relax artery linings. But so far, the evidence is preliminary.

**5. Diabetes.** Nut eaters also have a lower risk of diabetes. But so far, feeding studies haven't found that nuts lower blood sugar levels over the long term.<sup>4</sup>

### Lose the Belly?

"Go a little nutty to lose the belly," urged the June 2 headline in the *National Post*. "In moderate portions, cashews, almonds and even peanuts may help keep weight off."

How would a food that

squeezes some 300 calories into 6 tablespoons help you keep the weight off?

"Women who consume nuts twice per week not only avoided gaining weight, they actually had less chance of becoming overweight or obese than those who avoided nuts entirely," explained the *Post* article. True enough. But nut eaters may be more likely to exercise or do something else that keeps them lean.

What happens when researchers tell people to eat nuts? In studies that gave people about 250 to 350 calories' worth a day, they gained little or no weight.<sup>5,6</sup> And when people were given 500 calories' worth of peanuts every day for two months, they gained only two pounds, instead of the eight pounds you'd expect.<sup>7</sup>

No one knows exactly why. People may compensate by eating less later, or the calories from nuts may not be fully absorbed. But that doesn't mean you can eat nuts 'til the cows come home and never gain a pound. The people in the studies

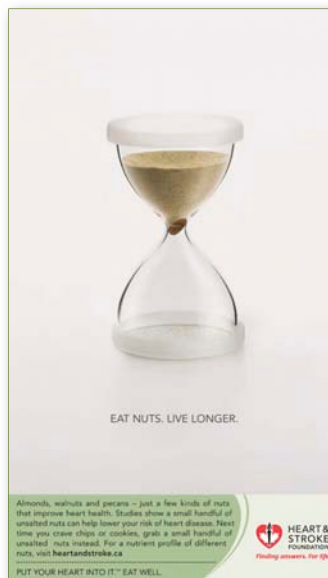
got discrete amounts of nuts, not a can or jar to dip into at will.

So if you're careful not to overdo it, you may not gain weight. How does that make nuts help you lose your belly?

### Salt Matters

A 1/3-cup serving of salted or seasoned or flavoured nuts typically has anywhere from 100 to 400 milligrams of sodium. You can dodge it all if the label says "unsalted," if you buy natural or raw nuts, or if you don't see salt in the ingredients list.

If you want a little salt, it pays to shop



Most nuts and seeds can help lower cholesterol. Just don't go overboard.



around. For instance, a 50-gram serving of Planters Tamari Flavoured Almonds reaches 390 mg of sodium—more than triple what you'd get in 50 grams of Naturalife or SunRidge Farms Organic Roasted Tamari Almonds (120 mg).

Love peanuts? Munchies Crunchy Coated Peanuts clock in at 380 to 540 mg of sodium per serving. Blame it on the salt in the “delicious seasoned coating” in flavours like Jalapeño & Cheddar, Sour Cream & Pepper, and Sweet & Spicy. Compliments Extra Crunchy Kettle Cooked Jalapeno Peanuts trim the sodium to (a still-too-high) 300 mg. Planters Dry Roasted Hot & Spicy Peanuts manage to get it down to 210 mg.

Tip: Look for brands that say “50% less sodium” or “lightly salted” on the label. But always check the sodium (and the serving size) on the Nutrition Facts panel.



The best mixes are at least 50% pecans, peanuts, or another Best Bite nut.

A brand that doesn't make a salt claim could be as low in sodium as a “lightly salted” brand.

### Sneaky Servings

A serving of most nuts has around 300 calories. So why do the Planters Salted Cocktail Peanuts that come in a foil bag have only 230 calories?

It's the serving size, my dear Watson. Health Canada recommends a 40-to-60-gram serving for nuts that are eaten as snacks, but companies are free to choose any serving they want. Go with 35 grams (like Planters) and, Voilà! You've created a diet food.

Oddly enough, when Planters packages the same nuts in a canister, the company uses a 50-gram serving, so the calories hit 330. Go figure.

At least Blue Diamond Almonds “100 calories per bag” doesn't pretend to be anything other than a mini-snack. Stick to a single (18-gram) bag and you'll keep a lid on calories.



You don't need the salt in the “coating.”

If your almonds or cashews or peanuts or whatever are swaddled in a chocolate or “yogurt” coating, you not only lose nuts, you also gain saturated fat. (And the “yogurt” is mostly evaporated cane juice and fractionated palm oil. Yum.)

So Naturalife Yogurt Almonds or SunRidge Farms Organic Yogurt Almonds end up with 7 grams of sat fat (a third of a day's worth) in every 40-gram serving. That may be a bit less sat fat than you'd get in plain chocolate (9 grams), but it's way beyond nut territory.

### Tips

■ **Dry-roasted or oil-roasted or raw?** It doesn't matter. Roasted nuts (with or without oil) are no higher in saturated fat or calories.

■ **Calorie density.** Nuts are calorie-dense and hard to resist. But if you use them as a garnish for your salads, rice, stir-fries, or cereal, you may be less likely to overdo it.

■ **Peanut butter.** It's a question mark. In theory, peanut butter should have the same impact on cholesterol as peanuts (assuming it contains no trans fat). But (unlike nut eaters) peanut butter eaters have no lower risk of heart disease or obesity (though they do have a lower risk of diabetes). And remember that a serving of peanut butter (190 calories) is only two flat table-spoons. It's easy to eat more.

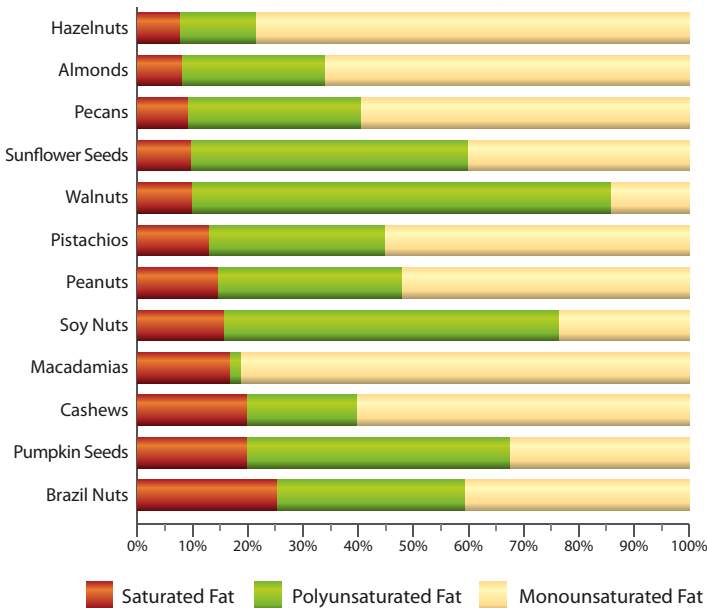


Thanks to the smaller serving size, the nuts in the foil bag look better for you than the (identical) nuts in the canister.

■ **Shells.** When you can, buy nuts in the shell. It may slow down your snacking.

■ **Pack your own.** Make your own portion-controlled serving by tossing some nuts into a resealable plastic bag. 🌱

## THE NUT CASE



Which nuts or seeds are good for your heart? Any of them should lower your LDL (“bad”) cholesterol if you eat them instead of meat, butter, or other saturated fats. But only nuts that have at least twice as much polyunsaturated fat as saturated fat lower LDL if you eat them instead of pasta, rice, or other carbohydrates. That means pistachios, walnuts, pecans, almonds, peanuts, hazelnuts, soy nuts, sunflower seeds, and pumpkin seeds, but not macadamias, cashews, or Brazil nuts (so those three don't get a Best Bite).

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture Nutrient Database.

### Not So Sweet

Adding sugar replaces nut calories with empty calories from sugar. That's why we didn't give a Best Bite to any sweetened nuts.

Honourable Mentions could have up to 10 grams (2½ teaspoons) of sugar per serving. That's enough to supply some sweetness, but it draws a line between nuts and candy.

And don't assume that sweet nuts are salt-free. Companies add sugar and salt to nuts (which are naturally fatty) so that they can push all of your taste buttons at once.

<sup>1</sup> BMJ 317: 1341, 1998.  
<sup>2</sup> Arch. Intern. Med. 162: 1382, 2002.  
<sup>3</sup> J. Nutr. 135: 2082, 2005.  
<sup>4</sup> J. Nutr. 138: 1752S, 2008.  
<sup>5</sup> Br. J. Nutr. 94: 859, 2005.  
<sup>6</sup> Br. J. Nutr. 98: 651, 2007.  
<sup>7</sup> Int. J. Obesity 26: 1129, 2002.

# IN A NUTSHELL

**Best Bites** (✓✓) contain no more than 100 milligrams of sodium per 1/3-cup serving (50 grams). **Honourable Mentions** (✓) can have up to 200 mg of sodium and 10 grams (2½ teaspoons) of added sugar per serving. We disqualified cashews, Brazil nuts, and macadamias (see “The Nut Case”). To earn a Best Bite or Honourable Mention, mixed nuts also have to be at least 50% peanuts, almonds, or another Best Bite nut.

Nuts are ranked from least to most sodium and sat fat, then most to least protein. *Sweetened nuts* are ranked from least to most sugar, sodium, and sat fat, then most to least protein. For nuts (like Brazil nuts or unsalted almonds) that vary very little, one entry (*in italics*) covers most brands.

## Almonds (50 grams—about 40 nuts—unless noted)

	Calories	Protein (g)	Sat Fat (g)	Sodium (mg)
✓✓ Raw or roasted, unsalted, any brand	300	11	2	0
✓✓ Planters, Lightly Salted	330	10	2.5	40
✓✓ Planters or Tasty Crunch Roasted <sup>1</sup>	330	10	2.5	80
✓ Naturalife Roasted or SunRidge Farms Organic Roasted, Tamari (40 g) <sup>1</sup>	230	7	2	100
✓ Maisie Jane's Organic Dry Roasted, Tamari	290	11	2	110
✓ Trophy Roasted, with Sea Salt (45 g)	300	9	2	110
✓ Blue Diamond Roasted	310	10	2	150
✓ Skeet & Ike's Organic Roasted, Tamari	370	13	1.5	170
✓ Compliments, Soya Flavoured	310	12	2	200
Blue Diamond BOLD, Wasabi & Soy Sauce	300	10	2	210
Blue Diamond, Smokehouse	300	10	2	270
Planters, Tamari Flavoured	310	11	2	390
Compliments, Great Value, or Planters, Hickory Smoked (40 g) <sup>1</sup>	260	8	2	390

## Cashews (50 grams—about 30 nuts)

Raw or roasted, unsalted, any brand	280	8	4	10
Planters, Lightly Salted	320	9	5	70
Planters	320	9	5	140

## Peanuts (50 grams—about 50 nuts—unless noted)

✓✓ Raw or roasted, unsalted, any brand	290	13	3.5	10
✓✓ Planters Cocktail, Lightly Salted	330	12	5	80
✓✓ No Name Blanched	330	15	3.5	90
✓ Compliments Value or Great Value Roasted <sup>1</sup>	320	13	5	130
✓ Compliments Dry Roasted, Seasoned	310	13	4	140
✓ Trophy Kettle Cooked, salted (45 g)	290	10	4.5	140
✓ Planters—Barbecue or Cocktail <sup>1</sup>	320	12	5	170
✓ Whole Foods 365 Everyday Value Roasted	290	13	3.5	200
Trophy Dry Roasted	310	13	4.5	210
Planters Dry Roasted, Hot & Spicy	320	13	4.5	210
Compliments Extra Crunchy Kettle Cooked <sup>1</sup>	320	11	5	300
No Name, Barbecue Flavoured	310	14	3.5	320
Trophy Kettle Cooked, Firecracker Jalapeno (45 g)	280	10	4	330
Planters Dry Roasted	310	15	5	330
President's Choice Dry Roasted, Lightly Seasoned	320	11	4.5	370
Compliments Value, BBQ	310	13	4.5	430
Munchies Crunchy Coated <sup>1</sup>	290	10	3	480

## Pistachios (50 grams—about 90 nuts)

	Calories	Protein (g)	Sat Fat (g)	Sodium (mg)
✓✓ Raw or roasted, unsalted, any brand	280	10	2.5	0
Planters Dry Roasted	310	11	3	250

## Mixed Unsweetened Nuts (50 grams—about 35 to 50 nuts)

Planters Deluxe with 50% Cashews, Lightly Salted	330	9	4.5	90
Planters Macadamia Lovers Mix	370	5	5	90
✓✓ Planters Pecan Lovers Mix	340	7	3.5	100
Planters Cashew Lovers Mix	340	7	5	110
✓ No Name, 80% Peanuts	320	12	5	120
Planters Deluxe with 50% Cashews	330	9	4	130
✓ Compliments Value Roasted, 80% Peanuts	330	11	4.5	170
✓ Planters, 60% Peanuts	330	11	4.5	170
✓ Planters Pistachio Lovers Mix	310	10	3	180
✓ True North Almonds, Pistachios, Walnuts, Pecans	340	8	3	200

## Miscellaneous Nuts (approx. number of nuts in 50 g, raw or roasted)

✓✓ Filberts or Hazelnuts (35)	310	7	2	0
✓✓ Pecans (35 halves) or Walnuts (25 halves) <sup>1</sup>	340	6	3	0
Macadamias (20)	360	4	6	0
Brazil nuts (10)	330	7	7.5	0
Macadamias, salted (20)	360	4	6	130
✓ Pecans, salted (35 halves)	360	5	3.5	190
Soy nuts, salted (½ cup)	240	20	1.5	400

## Pumpkin Seeds (50 grams—about 1/3 cup—raw or roasted)

✓✓ Pumpkin kernels, unsalted	260	16	4	10
✓ Eden Organic	300	13	4	150
Spitz, Salted	280	13	3.5	960

## Sunflower Seeds (50 grams—about 1/2 cup—raw or roasted)

✓✓ Sunflower kernels, unsalted	290	10	3	0
Spitz Sunflower Kernels, Salted	290	11	2.5	250
Spitz, Salted	250	10	2.5	800

## 100 Calorie Packs (18 grams)

✓✓ Blue Diamond Almonds, 100 Calories	100	4	0.5	0
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## Sweetened Nuts

(50 grams—about 1/3 cup—unless noted)

	Calories	Protein (g)	Sat Fat (g)	Sodium (mg)	Sugar (g)
✓ Compliments, No Name, or Planters Peanuts, Honey Roasted <sup>1</sup>	320	11	4	40	7
✓ Trophy Peanuts, Honey Roasted	300	10	3.5	110	7
✓ Great Value Peanuts, Honey Roasted	300	10	3	200	8
✓ Blue Diamond Almonds, Honey Roasted	290	9	2	110	10
✓ True North Clusters—Almond or Pecan, Almond, Peanut (9 pieces) <sup>1</sup>	310	9	3	130	10
SunRidge Farms Organic Yogurt Almonds (40 g—¼ cup)	220	3	7	30	17
Planters Chocolate (40 g—¼ cup) <sup>1</sup>	220	4	6.5	40	17
Trophy Praline Nut Mix & Cashews	270	7	2.5	250	17
Naturalife Yogurt Almonds (40 g—8 pieces)	190	2	7	230	19
President's Choice Pecans, Praline	300	3	2	110	23
Planters Peanuts, Old Fashioned Toffee (42 g—¼ cup)	210	5	2	130	23

✓✓ Best Bite. ✓ Honourable Mention. <sup>1</sup>Average.

**Daily Limits** (for a 2,000-calorie diet): **Saturated Fat:** 20 grams. **Sodium:** 1,500 milligrams. **Sugar:** 40 grams (10 teaspoons).

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