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NEW STUDY HIGHLIGHTS POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF PEANUTS FOR CARDIOVASCULAR HEALTH

May 8, 2017— Peanuts and foods made from them, like peanut butter, are as quintessentially American as apple pie and baseball. In fact, two US presidents (Thomas Jefferson and Jimmy Carter) were peanut farmers before their tenures in the White House. It turns out, however, that peanuts represent much more than tasty snacks and the foundation of America's much-loved and very popular favorite sandwich. Peanuts– which are actually legumes and not nuts – are also a great source of protein, vitamins, minerals, and a host of biologically active compounds. And although scientists don't understand the physiologic mechanisms involved, studies suggest that people who eat peanuts may have lower risks for diabetes and cardiovascular disease than people who don't. One possible reason for this is that peanut consumption helps lower the spike in blood lipids that typically follows a high-fat meal. To help test this, Dr. Penny Kris-Etherton (The Pennsylvania State University) and colleagues conducted a randomized, controlled, intervention trial (the gold-standard of nutrition research) with15 healthy but overweight or obese men. You can read more about this study, which is briefly described below, in the May 2017 issue of *The Journal of Nutrition*.

To test their hypothesis that peanut consumption improves blood lipids and blood vessel function, Kris-Etherton and colleagues asked study participants to consume two different chocolate-flavored, dairy-based shakes – one containing 3 ounces of ground peanuts and the other with no peanuts. Both shakes, which were consumed one week apart in a randomized order, had similar amounts of calories, carbohydrates, fat, saturated fat, and protein. Blood was drawn before the shake was consumed and again 30, 60, 12, and 240 minutes later and analyzed for lipids, lipoproteins (HDL and LDL cholesterol), glucose, and insulin. Blood flow was also assessed as a measure of blood vessel integrity.

As hypothesized, consuming the peanut-rich beverage helped lower the expected increases in blood lipids. Peanut consumption also improved blood flow, particularly in study participants with elevated blood cholesterol levels to begin with. There were no effects on lipoproteins, glucose, and insulin. The research team concluded that the inclusion of peanuts as part of a high-fat meal improved blood lipid responses and blood vessel function – at least in otherwise healthy overweight or obese men. As such, they posit that more chronic peanut consumption may benefit artery health and, thus, decrease overall risk for cardiovascular disease.

Reference: Liu X, Hill AM, West SG, Gabauer RM, McCrea CE, Fleming JA, Kris-Etherton PM. Acute peanut consumption alters postprandial lipids and vascular responses in healthy overweight or obese men. Journal of Nutrition 147:835-840.

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