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Peanuts & Peanut Butter in Perspective: Heart Disease

Heart disease is the number one killer of both men and women in the United States. Eating peanuts and peanut butter is a small, delicious dietary change that can lead to big health rewards, especially for your heart.

Research Up-Date

A new controlled clinical trial proves that how you lose weight affects your heart. A higher unsaturated-fat, lower carb, peanut and peanut butter diet lowered heart disease risk by 14% compared to baseline. The higher unsaturated-fat diet group lowered their triglyceride levels and maintained their “good” high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol. More importantly, these beneficial effects lasted even after going off the weight-loss diet. In contrast, the low-fat diet group had a rebound in triglycerides after going off the diet and, therefore, the low-fat group did not lower their heart disease risk as much as the higher unsaturated-fat diet group (1).

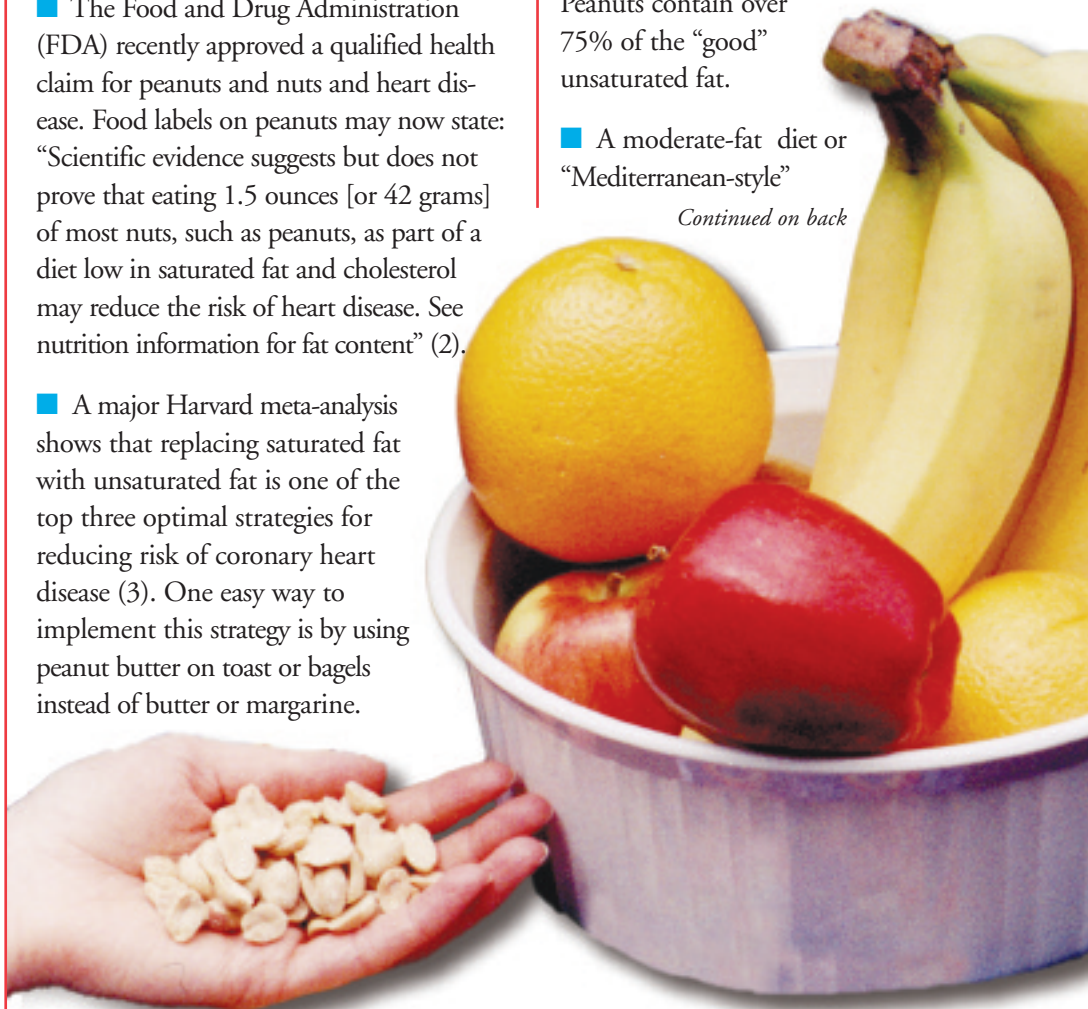
The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently approved a qualified health claim for peanuts and nuts and heart disease. Food labels on peanuts may now state: “Scientific evidence suggests but does not prove that eating 1.5 ounces [or 42 grams] of most nuts, such as peanuts, as part of a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol may reduce the risk of heart disease. See nutrition information for fat content” (2).

A major Harvard meta-analysis shows that replacing saturated fat with unsaturated fat is one of the top three optimal strategies for reducing risk of coronary heart disease (3). One easy way to implement this strategy is by using peanut butter on toast or bagels instead of butter or margarine.

Peanuts contain over 75% of the “good” unsaturated fat.

A moderate-fat diet or “Mediterranean-style”

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Peanut Portion Pointers: ■ One ounce of peanuts is a small handful, or about 40 pieces. Look for single-serving packets at the store to help with portion control. ■ Two tablespoons of peanut butter is about the size of a ping-pong ball. Keep one on your kitchen counter in your fruit bowl.

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weight-loss diet may be more beneficial than a low-fat diet for heart health. A clinical study showed that a moderate-fat diet with peanuts and peanut butter daily lowered total cholesterol by 11% and the “bad” low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol by 14%. Triglycerides were also lowered but the good HDL cholesterol was maintained. The higher monounsaturated-fat diet reduced the risk of heart disease by 21%, compared to the typical American diet. The low-fat diet reduced the risk by only 12% compared to the typical American diet (4).

■ A USDA study found that trans fat was non-detectable in 11 types of both natural and commercial brands of peanut butter, including Skippy, Jif, Peter Pan, and Smuckers (5). All types of peanut butter can list zero grams of trans fat on the Nutrition Facts panel, according to trans fat labeling regulations that were approved in July 2003.

Quick Facts

about Peanuts & Peanut Butter

- Peanuts and peanut butter, like all plant foods, contain no cholesterol.
- Commercial peanut butter brands and natural brands both contain non-detectable levels of trans fat. Therefore, both labels list zero grams of trans fat.
- Peanuts contain phytochemicals such as beta-sitosterol and resveratrol, the same antioxidant found in red wine, both of which are beneficial for heart health.

The Peanut Institute is a non-profit organization that supports nutrition research and develops educational programs to encourage healthy lifestyles.

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■ A clinical study from Purdue University showed that eating about three ounces of peanuts daily significantly increased intake of magnesium, fiber, folate, vitamin E, copper, and arginine, all of which are important for heart health. The study also found that eating peanuts significantly increases blood levels of magnesium (6).

Dietary Recommendations

- Current guidelines from both the National Academy of Science (NAS) and the National Cholesterol Education Program (NCEP) recommend a moderate-fat diet (25 to 35% of calories from fat), provided most of the fat is unsaturated (7,8).
- The National Academy of Science issued a report with recommendations to limit trans fat in the diet as much as possible (9).
- The American Heart Association allows for up to 35% of calories from fat and recommends foods with unsaturated fat such as vegetable oils, nuts, and fish (10).

Replacing Foods High in Saturated Fat with Peanuts or Peanut Butter

- Spread peanut butter on a slice of whole-grain toast instead of an English muffin with butter.
- Add half of an ounce of peanuts to your salad in place of croutons.
- Dip celery in peanut butter instead of a cream cheese dip.
- For a change, replace the usual spaghetti and meatballs with a Thai-inspired, whole-wheat pasta dish with peanut butter sauce.
- Spread some chunky peanut butter on a half of a banana for a sweet, balanced evening snack.



References:

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