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**NEW AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION DIETARY GUIDELINES
GIVE GREEN LIGHT TO PEANUTS**

November 1, 2000, Arlington, VA -- The American Heart Association's new dietary guidelines are published in this week's issue of *Circulation*. One of the four major guidelines encourages Americans to eat more unsaturated fats from vegetables, fish, legumes, peanuts and nuts in place of foods high in saturated fat to achieve a desirable cholesterol profile. All together, the guidelines provide population-wide recommendations for cardiovascular disease prevention and treatment that are supported by decades of research. These user-friendly guidelines help consumers put research into practice by placing an increased emphasis on foods and the overall eating pattern, rather than focusing on numbers and percentages.

The American Heart Association (AHA) guidelines on cholesterol and fat mirror the new United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Dietary Guidelines (May 2000). Both guidelines place an increased emphasis on decreasing saturated fat and cholesterol in the diet. But the AHA guidelines go one step further and suggest replacing saturated fat with unsaturated fat, instead of carbohydrate.

The AHA Scientific Statement concludes that, "there is now clear evidence that total and LDL cholesterol levels are reduced comparably by replacement of saturated fat with either unsaturated fat or carbohydrate during weight maintenance conditions. Moreover, a diet relatively high in unsaturated fat can prevent or attenuate the decrease in HDL cholesterol and the increase in triglycerides that can occur in some individuals' response to a high-carbohydrate, lower-fat diet." This conclusion comes from a wide body of research studies, one of which was conducted by Dr. Kris-Etherton and published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* (December, 1999). The study showed that diets higher in monounsaturated fat from peanuts, peanut butter, peanut oil and olive oil, reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease by 21% compared to the average American diet, whereas a low-fat diet reduced the risk by only 12%.

This advice also is supported by research on metabolic syndrome, which is characterized by a combination of risk factors for heart disease and type II diabetes. For the more than 75 million Americans who are affected by metabolic syndrome, eating a low-fat, high-carbohydrate diet may actually increase the risk of heart disease. Instead of increasing carbohydrates, these people should replace the saturated fat in their diets with unsaturated fats from vegetables, fish, peanuts, peanut butter, nuts and olive oil.

Recent research is showing that peanuts fit into all four of the American Heart Association dietary goals.

1. Achieve an overall healthy eating pattern. Include a variety of fruits, vegetables, grains, low-fat or nonfat dairy products, fish, legumes, poultry and lean meats. This goal emphasizes the total quality of the diet. Complex plant foods like fruits and vegetables, legumes, and grains, are nutrient dense and contain plenty of fiber, antioxidants and phytochemicals that are thought to benefit health. Peanuts are actually legumes, but are categorized with other nuts when it comes to nutrition research and consumption patterns. Peanuts and peanut butter account for 75% of the "nuts" eaten in the United States. They are eaten like nuts as snacks and are found in the USDA Food Guide Pyramid in the protein group.

2. Maintain an appropriate body weight. Match energy intake to energy needs and make appropriate changes to achieve weight loss when necessary. The message here is that a calorie is a calorie. When researchers at Harvard School of Public Health put subjects on a calorie-controlled diet, either moderate in fat (with healthy fat from peanuts, peanut butter and olive oil) or low in fat, they found that those on a higher fat diet actually lost more weight. And because the diet was tastier and more satisfying, they were able to stick with it and keep the weight off longer.

3. Achieve a desirable cholesterol profile. The AHA advises limiting foods high in saturated fat and cholesterol and substituting unsaturated fat from vegetables, fish, legumes and nuts. When researchers at Penn State University tested diets that included 2-3 servings daily of peanuts or peanut butter, rich in monounsaturated fats (MUFA), they found that total and LDL cholesterol was lowered by 11-14%, compared to the average American diet which is higher in saturated fat. Small changes in diet can lead to big rewards in health. Substitute monounsaturated fats for saturated fats by using peanut butter on your bagel instead of butter or cream cheese, dipping vegetables and fruit in melted peanut butter instead of cream-based dressings, or sprinkling toasted peanuts on salads instead of croutons.

4. Achieve a desirable blood pressure. Limit salt and alcohol and maintaining a health body weight and a diet with emphasis on vegetables, fruits, and low-fat or nonfat dairy products. This goal is similar to that of the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stopping Hypertension) Diet which recommends that people eat four to five servings from the nuts, seeds and legumes group each week. The DASH diet is rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy and peanuts, nuts, legumes and seeds and has been shown to substantially lower blood pressure levels. In addition to a significant amount heart-healthy monounsaturated fat, peanuts and peanut butter also contain phytosterols, vitamin E, folate, potassium, magnesium, zinc, and fiber, all of which are thought to benefit health.

The Peanut Institute is a non-profit organization that supports nutrition research and develops educational programs to encourage healthful lifestyles. Learn more about peanuts and health at <http://www.peanut-institute.org>

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