



**For Immediate Release**

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**Mediterranean Diet Reduces Mortality from  
Heart Disease and Cancer**

*Albany, GA, June 27, 2003* -- University of Athens Medical School and Harvard School of Public Health researchers report that people who closely follow a Mediterranean Diet can reduce the risk of death due to coronary heart disease by 33% and death due to cancer by 24%. The study was published in this week's issue of *New England Journal of Medicine*.

This is the first large trial that shows that a higher fat diet that contains mainly unsaturated fat and includes vegetables, legumes and nuts, fruits, whole grains, and fish, can significantly reduce death from heart disease and cancer. In the study, over 22,000 participants were given a "diet score" depending on how closely they adhered to the traditional Mediterranean Diet. For example, fruits and nuts were combined in a food category and those who ate them regularly had a better diet score. As the individuals' diet score increased, the risk of dying from chronic disease decreased. The authors emphasize that it is the overall eating pattern that provides the health benefits, instead a single food or nutrient.

These findings are consistent with newer dietary recommendations from the National Academy of Science at the Institute of Medicine (1) that allow for up to 35% fat in the diet, provided most of it is unsaturated fat, found in foods like peanuts, peanut butter, olive oil and avocados.

Although they are actually legumes, peanuts are categorized with other nuts when it comes to nutrition research and consumption patterns. Peanuts are eaten like nuts as snacks and are found in the US Food Guide Pyramid in the protein group, along with other nuts. Recent US Department of Agriculture data shows that over two thirds of the "nuts" eaten in the United States are peanuts and peanut butter. About 35% of total nut consumption is peanut butter, 33% are peanuts, 6% are almonds, 6% are coconuts, 5% are pecans, 5% are walnuts, and 10% are all other nuts combined. (2,3) This data is consistent with an earlier

study by Harvard researchers that shows that in the Nurses' Health Study about half of the "nuts" eaten were peanuts. (4)

In the United States, many people fall short on fruit and vegetable consumption and consume too many saturated fats relative to good unsaturated fats from peanuts, nuts, peanut butter, olive oil, and fish. This study shows that small dietary changes can lead to big rewards when it comes to health. Substitute peanut butter on whole grain bread for a deli sandwich at lunchtime. Try a new fruit or vegetable once a week to add variety to your diet. Snack on peanuts in the afternoon to satisfy hunger or sprinkle peanuts on salads for extra crunch.

Peanut butter and peanuts contain mainly good unsaturated fat and are low in saturated fat. Peanuts have more plant protein than any other nut and are also rich in vitamin E, folate, fiber, magnesium, potassium, zinc, phytosterols and antioxidants, all of which are thought to be important to health.

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References:

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3. USDA/ERS Supply and Utilization Report, April 5, 2003.
4. Hu, F.B.; Stampfer, M.J.; Manson, J.E.; Rimm, E.; Colditz, G.A.; Rosner, B.A.; Speizer, F.E.; Hennekens, C.H.; Willett, W.C. Frequent Nut Consumption and Risk of Coronary Heart Disease in Women: Prospective Cohort Study. *British Medical Journal*. 1998;317:1341-5.

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 [www.peanut-institute.org](http://www.peanut-institute.org)

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