

Contact: Pat.Kearney@pmkassociates.com
561.213.3700

Study Shows Peanuts and Peanut Butter to be “Smart Snacks” for Preventing Obesity

Albany, GA March 7, 2016 A new study shows that high risk adolescents who consistently consumed a daily snack of peanuts or peanut butter significantly decreased their Body Mass Index (BMI) over a six month period. The study, “Benefits of a snacking intervention as part of a school-based obesity intervention for Mexican American children”, was published in the *Journal of Applied Research on Children*.

The six month, randomized study followed a large group of 257 Latino adolescents who were overweight and obese. Despite being at very high risk, the children who ate the peanut and peanut butter snacks more than four times a week showed better results than those that ate them less than once a week or not at all. The average age was 12 years old and both boys and girls showed similar benefits. The snacks were one ounce of peanuts or $\frac{3}{4}$ ounce of peanut butter that was often used as a dip for vegetables or fruit. Snacking patterns showed that peanut butter was consumed 56% of the time and peanuts 44% of the time.

Dr. Craig Johnston, principal investigator at the University of Houston, said, “We have shown that schools, aftercare programs, and parents can easily replace unhealthy snacks with peanuts or peanut butter and it works on many different levels.”

According to USDA, about one quarter or more of our daily calories comes from snacks, about the same as calories from lunch. Therefore, it is important to make sure those calories reduce hunger and provide essential nutrients to maintain a healthy weight.

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act required the USDA to issue new ‘Smart Snacks in School’ nutrition standards. “Based on these standards, peanuts were one of the “smartest snacks”, with zero empty calories. Furthermore, the relatively high fat and protein content of peanuts helps to promote satiety while providing a healthy snack option for weight management,” the researchers state. A USDA fact sheet can be downloaded at http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/allfoods_infographic.pdf

Peanuts have more protein than any other nut and are rich in healthy oils, fiber, many important vitamins, minerals, and phyto-nutrients. This powerful package not only can help to prevent obesity, but has been shown to help prevent the development of many chronic diseases. Another

recently published study in the journal *Pediatrics* reported that while improving their diets slightly, excess body weight continues to be a health concern for US adolescents. Peanut snacks can provide the dual benefit of weight management and healthier diets.

The study was supported by a grant from the USDA/Agricultural Research Service.

The Peanut Institute is a non-profit organization that supports nutrition research and educational programs that promote healthier diet patterns and lifestyles. For more information go to www.peanut-institute.org and www.peanutpower.org.

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