The American diet is taking a major shift towards plant-based eating. For the first time ever, the *2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* tells us loud and clear: eat a plant-based diet that includes plants as an important source of protein.¹ In the 2010 report of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC), peanuts were highlighted as the nut eaten most by Americans. Peanut butter and peanuts have more protein than any other nut, and because of their popularity, peanuts are a major plant protein source for all Americans. The DGAC stated that adding peanuts to our meals “provides an important source of plant protein and other nutrients” we need each and every day.

**What is Plant-Based Eating?**

We are moving towards a healthful, balanced way of eating, one that includes nuts, seeds, and oils. Eating peanuts and peanut products can help us move towards this healthful way of eating.

Plant-based eating is a way of expanding the variety of foods on our plate, with the added health potential as the cherry on top. It can be applied to today’s health-conscious world, while adding an exciting exploration of food flavors and combinations.

The 2010 report of the DGAC defined plant-based eating as one “that emphasizes vegetables, dry beans and peas, fruits, whole grains, nuts and seeds.”¹ This report went on further to say that this pattern of eating can be done with an omnivorous diet.

Peanuts and peanut products are rich in nutrients, powerful for health, delicious in flavor, and versatile in every dish.

A plant-based eating pattern that includes peanuts, peanut butter, and other peanut products every day is in sync with these national recommendations; this pattern is also aligned with the way we look at foods now.
Did you know:
Almost 70% of nuts consumed in the US are peanuts and peanut butter!17

The Public

Everyone is in agreement: plant-based eating is the new wave to hit our health and taste buds. According to the National Restaurant Association’s 2010 Top Ten Facts, 73% of adults say they are trying to eat healthier now than two years ago.2 This new way of healthful eating means cutting down high-fat meat portions and replacing them with plant proteins that have good fats. Since peanuts have more protein than most other nuts, including peanuts and peanut butter in your next meal is an easy way to get all of the protein and good fats that your body needs.

Health Professionals

Health advocates from around the world are also encouraging plant-based eating. From the Mediterranean, Japanese, Indian, and Asian Food Pyramid to the Canadian Rainbow, all have one important thing in common: the foundation of these food guides emphasize grains, vegetables, and plant-based products. The 2010 DGAC stated that, “several distinct dietary patterns are associated with health benefits… [with] a common feature [having an] emphasis on plant foods.”1

Health professionals have long recommended that the majority of the total calories eaten in a day should come from plants and grain products. They now encourage that more of the proteins we get should come from plants. Including peanuts and peanut products in your meal plan is a way to meet these recommendations.

Plant-Based Eating for Disease Prevention

Peanuts and peanut butter are full of nutrients. They contain a high amount of protein, fiber, and the vitamins and minerals that have shown to help reduce epidemiologic diseases plaguing the nation today. These diseases include heart disease, cancer, obesity, and diabetes.

Heart Disease

The perfect balance of good fats found in peanuts and peanut products have been shown to reduce heart disease risks. A study by Purdue University in 2000 found that when men and women replaced bad fats from their diets with good fats from peanuts and peanut products, their cholesterol levels decreased.3 A review by The Journal of Nutrition, published in 2008, went on further to explain that the balance of good fats and other nutrients from peanuts may prevent cardiovascular diseases like stroke. They also stated that people who ate peanuts two or more times a week had a lower risk of heart disease.4

In the 2010 report of the DGAC, it was highlighted in a study published in 2009 that 5 servings of peanut butter a week greatly lowered cholesterol levels and risk of heart disease.5 The committee supports the idea of eating unsalted peanuts as part of a balanced diet can lower heart disease risks and improve cholesterol levels.1

Cancer

Resveratrol, vitamin E, and other powerful bioactives and antioxidants are found especially in peanuts, their skins and roots, and peanut butter.6-14 These antioxidants may decrease our risk of many types of cancers.15,16

A 10-year-follow-up study published in The World Journal of Gastroenterology in 2006 concluded that women who ate peanuts regularly reduced their risk of colorectal cancer, citing peanuts’ antioxidants as the benefactor.16 Another study, published in Nutrition and Cancer in 2000, stated that peanuts, peanut oil, peanut butter, and peanut flour have a specific antioxidant that may protect us from cancers.15
Obesity

There are many studies that looked at plant-based eating patterns and how it can help us manage our weight, diabetes, and other obesity-related diseases. A study from Brigham and Women’s Hospital showed that those who are trying to lose weight had a higher risk of falling off their diet routine with a diet that is too restricted (i.e. low-fat diets). On the other hand, people who were on a moderate-fat diet plan, one that includes peanuts, stuck to their diet plan for a longer period of time.

Why Plant-Based Eating?
Because it Tastes Good!

Even kids who do not normally eat peanuts in their diet because of cultural patterns enjoyed peanut butter as a dip with their fruits and vegetables. In a study by Baylor’s College of Medicine, peanuts and peanut butter were given to a high-risk population that did not usually include peanuts or peanut butter in their cultural dishes. During this 12-week study; however, 60+ Mexican-American adolescents readily enjoyed peanuts and peanut butter as a snack in place of their unhealthful snack every day. The scientists concluded that peanuts are “a great example of a healthy food that kids will eat on a regular basis.”

Peanuts Are a Favorite Plant Protein

The fusion of flavors, aromas, and textures from all cultures make this new way of eating fun, exciting, and delicious. Plant-based eating provides all of the nutrition, flavor, and excitement as all the “fad diets” out there today, combined. Anyone can follow plant-based eating.

Scientists from the University of Washington found that when it comes to food, people looked primarily for three things: 1) it has to have lots of nutrients, 2) it should not cost a lot, and 3) it has to taste great. The lead scientist states that peanuts and peanut butter came out with some of the best scores in each of these three categories, and overall. Peanut and peanut butter is one of the most powerful plant foods that have a perfect balance of calories and nutrients. They are a food that has a lot of nutrients to offer, with the majority of calories coming from those good nutrients. People can enjoy peanuts and peanut butter every day.

There is no denying the power of plant-based eating with peanuts.

Ways a Handful of Peanuts Can Power-Up Your Meal

1. Add honey-roasted peanuts with your cold salads, chicken salads, or cole-slaw
2. Add peanuts when cooking rice
3. Add a handful of peanuts in your pasta dishes
4. Mix savory spices with peanut butter and spread it on your next sandwich or bagel
5. Mix some peanuts with your stir-fry
6. Add peanut butter to your smoothie
7. Add some peanuts to your yogurt
8. Add some peanuts to your holiday turkey stuffing
9. Mix savory spices with peanut butter for a delicious vegetable dip
10. Mix peanut butter with your meat marinade for added flavor
Peanut Butter and Fruit “Sushi”

Ingredients

Makes 4 rolls.

4 slices whole wheat bread
1/2 cup peanut butter
1 Granny Smith apple or 1 mango sliced into
1/4-inch strips
1/4 cup raisins or 1/4 cup toasted coconut
Juice of 1/2 lemon (optional)

Directions

If you are using apples and will not be eating the rolls right away, toss the apple strips with a little lemon juice.

For the rolls, start by flattening the slices of bread. We used a tortilla press lined with plastic wrap, but a rolling pin would work fine too. Spread peanut butter on one slice of bread, covering the whole slice. Add desired fillings horizontally on the bottom third of the slice.

Carefully roll from the bottom of the slice, tucking the ingredients under. Pull back the plastic wrap and finish rolling the bread. Use the wrap to shape and secure the roll. Slice into 5-6 pieces. Repeat with remaining slices of bread.

Equipment: Plastic wrap, rolling pin or tortilla press

References