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# Almonds: High Fat and Healthy

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*Almonds are useful in weight management programs.*

## Almonds: High Fat and Healthy

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

*Almonds lower the risk of heart disease.*

**A**lmonds are a popular treat. Yes, they are high in fat; but they're good for you. The fat is mostly the healthy monounsaturated fat. In addition, a serving of almonds provides a significant amount of magnesium, zinc, copper, manganese, iron, calcium, fiber, riboflavin and niacin.

While California now produces 80 percent of the world's crop, almonds originated from the Mediterranean region. In Palestine, the almond was a symbol of watchfulness and promise, due to its flowering in early spring. Almond blossoms were a model for the Menorah in the Temple. Cups filled with oil, shaped like almond blossoms, appeared on each branch of the candlestick.

The ancient Israelites valued almonds for their oil as well as for food. Almond oil was used for lamps and for anointing. In ancient cultures, almond oil was used to treat dry skin conditions such as eczema. Almond oil has emollient properties and improves skin tone. Today, almond oil is used in bakery goods, perfumery, candies and confectioneries.

While dry roasted almonds are a real treat, almonds are used in a variety of dishes such as pastries, curries, cookies, cupcakes, cereals and various desserts. Almonds can be processed into a beverage (almond milk) that functions as a dairy substitute for vegans and people with lactose intolerance. Almond butter is a popular spread, especially for those with a peanut allergy.

Almond flour is useful for carbohydrate-restricted diets or patients with diabetes. It is gluten-free, and it is popular for gluten-sensitive people and people with wheat allergies and celiac disease. Almonds are a rich source of phytosterols and the antioxidant vitamin E.

Almonds possess cardioprotective properties. A regular



consumption of almonds (raw or dry roasted) lowers blood levels of total cholesterol and LDL cholesterol within a month, while not changing HDL cholesterol or triglyceride levels. It is claimed that almonds have anti-inflammatory properties. Their skins do contain a high level of polyphenolics. Almonds can reduce C-reactive protein, a marker of artery-damaging inflammation.

In a six-month study, overweight and obese adults experienced greater reduction in body fat, waist circumference, body weight and systolic blood pressure on a low calorie diet supplemented with almonds than the changes observed with a high carbohydrate diet. The almond-enriched diet improved a preponderance of abnormalities associated with the metabolic syndrome, including its ability to lessen the rise in blood sugar after eating. Data from the Nurses' Health Study shows that women who eat at least one ounce of nuts or peanut butter each week have a 25 percent lower risk of developing gallstones.

Will eating nuts cause weight gain? An almond-enriched, low-calorie diet can help overweight individuals shed pounds more effectively than a low calorie diet high in complex carbohydrates. Participants who ate nuts at least two times per week were 31 percent less likely to gain weight over two years than were participants who never or almost never ate nuts.

Winston Craig, Ph.D., RD, is a professor of nutrition at Andrews University.