

Walnuts are top nut for heart-healthy antioxidants

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A new scientific study positions walnuts in the No. 1 slot among a family of foods that lay claim to being among Mother Nature's most nearly perfect packaged foods: Tree and ground nuts. In a report here today at the 241st National Meeting & Exposition of the American Chemical Society, scientists presented an analysis showing that walnuts have a combination of more healthful antioxidants and higher quality antioxidants than any other nut.

"Walnuts rank above peanuts, almonds, pecans, pistachios and other nuts," said Joe Vinson, Ph.D., who did the analysis. "A handful of walnuts contains almost twice as much antioxidants as an equivalent amount of any other commonly consumed nut. But unfortunately, people don't eat a lot of them. This study suggests that consumers should eat more walnuts as part of a healthy diet."

Vinson noted that nuts in general have an unusual combination of nutritional benefits - in addition those antioxidants - wrapped into a convenient and inexpensive package. Nuts, for instance, contain plenty of high-quality protein that can substitute for meat; vitamins and minerals; dietary fiber; and are dairy- and gluten-free. Years of research by scientists around the world link regular consumption of small amounts of nuts or peanut butter with decreased risk of heart disease, certain kinds of cancer, gallstones, Type 2 diabetes, and other health problems.

Despite all the previous research, scientists until now had not compared

both the amount and quality of antioxidants found in different nuts, Vinson said. He filled that knowledge gap by analyzing antioxidants in nine different types of nuts: walnuts, almonds, peanuts, pistachios, hazelnuts, Brazil nuts, cashews, macadamias, and pecans. Walnuts had the highest levels of antioxidants.

Vinson also found that the quality, or potency, of antioxidants present in walnuts was highest among the nuts. Antioxidants in walnuts were 2-15 times as potent as vitamin E, renowned for its powerful antioxidant effects that protect the body against damaging natural chemicals involved in causing disease.

"There's another advantage in choosing walnuts as a source of antioxidants," said Vinson, who is with the University of Scranton in Pennsylvania. "The heat from roasting nuts generally reduces the quality of the antioxidants. People usually eat walnuts raw or unroasted, and get the full effectiveness of those antioxidants."

If nuts are so healthful and nutritious, why don't people eat more? Vinson's research shows, for instance, that nuts account for barely 8 percent of the daily [antioxidants](#) in the average person's diet. Many people, he said, may not be aware that nuts are such a healthful food. Others may be concerned about gaining weight from a food so high in fat and calories. But he points out that nuts contain healthful polyunsaturated and monosaturated fats rather than artery-clogging saturated fat. As for the calories, eating nuts does not appear to cause weight gain and even makes people feel full and less likely to overeat. In a 2009 U. S. study, nut consumption was associated with a significantly lower risk of weight gain and obesity. Still, consumers should keep the portion size small. Vinson said it takes only about 7 [walnuts](#) a day, for instance, to get the potential health benefits uncovered in previous studies.

Provided by American Chemical Society

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