

# The nuts & bolts of good health

Why almonds and their ilk should be an everyday treat...

If you haven't eaten a handful of raw unsalted nuts today, there are three good reasons why you should – they're a heart-healthy food, they may reduce the risk of diabetes in women, and they can help you stay at a healthy weight.

"When it comes to heart health, it's partly their healthy poly- and monounsaturated fats that help," says Accredited Practising Dietitian, Monica Kubizniak from the Nutrition and Wellbeing Clinic in Sydney.

"They also supply other nutrients that are important for heart health, such as vitamin E and fibre, and studies have found that nuts help lower levels of 'bad' LDL cholesterol as well," she adds. "It's generally accepted that all nuts are good. In our clinic, we recommend a 30g serve of nuts per day, and this has good results with cholesterol lowering."

## So how much is enough?

The Dietitians' Association of Australia recommends eating about 30g (around 1/3 cup) of raw unsalted nuts every day, which amounts to approximately:

- 20 almonds
- 10 Brazil nuts
- 15 cashews
- 4 chestnuts
- 20 hazelnuts
- 15 macadamias
- 15 pecans
- 2 tablespoons of pine nuts
- 60 pistachios, equal to about 30g of kernels
- 10 whole walnuts or 20 walnut halves
- a small handful of mixed nuts

"As for Type 2 diabetes, research suggests that regular nut consumption may help reduce this risk, and that people who eat nuts as part of a healthy, balanced diet are slimmer than those who do not," says Monica.

"Nuts are filling, which means they make it easier to satisfy hunger. Certain findings also suggest that the fat present in nuts may not all be absorbed into the body, which may explain why some studies have found that regular nut eaters are less likely to be overweight.

"Different nuts offer different health benefits. Walnuts are one of the few plant sources of omega-3 fatty acids (the healthy fats found in fish), almonds contain calcium, and Brazil nuts are a good source of the mineral selenium. Peanuts are actually the seed of a legume bush, not a nut, yet they're a healthy nibble too, and have been linked to a lower risk of heart disease. They are best eaten with the skin on, because it contains a powerful antioxidant called resveratrol," says Monica.

A good way to include a daily serve of nuts while helping to control weight is to use them, not in addition to other foods, but as a replacement for foods that either have fewer health benefits or are high in saturated fat. "Instead of snacking on muffins or biscuits, for instance, have a handful of plain, unsalted nuts instead," suggests Monica, "or substitute pine nuts for some of the cheese on pizzas."

If you are a vegetarian or simply want to include some meatless meals in your diet, nuts provide many of the same nutrients (including protein, iron and zinc) as meat, as well as a flavour boost.

Monica says other easy ways to include nuts in meals is to add them to a stir-fry or use raw or lightly roasted nuts rather than cheese in a salad for



## Pork with lemongrass, almonds and cashews

Serves 4 (10g nuts per serve)

- 2 teaspoons canola oil
- 350g pork fillet, thinly sliced
- 1 stalk lemongrass, white part only, thinly sliced
- 2 tablespoons cashews
- 2 tablespoons whole almonds
- 2 green onions, cut into 3cm lengths
- 4 cups sliced mixed vegetables (eg, carrots, bok choy, snow peas, capsicum)
- 1 long red chilli, thinly sliced
- 1 tablespoon lime juice
- 1 tablespoon salt-reduced soy sauce
- 2 teaspoons brown sugar
- 4 cups rice noodles cooked, to serve

1 Heat oil in a wok or large non-stick frying pan.

2 Stir-fry pork in batches until browned, then remove and keep warm.

3 Add lemongrass, cashews, almonds, green onions, vegetables and chilli, and cook for 3–4 minutes, or until lemongrass is soft.

4 Return pork to wok, along with combined lime juice, soy and brown sugar. Cook for a further 3 minutes. Serve immediately with noodles.