

Letter to the Editor

Your heart will go nuts for peanuts

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Peanuts are a good protein source, and an excellent fuel because of their fat, and to a lesser degree, carbohydrate, content. People always worry at the mention of the word 'fat', but fat is just a fuel to burn in daily activity. If we take a balanced diet, the intake of fats and carbohydrates are burned up in daily activity. Trouble starts only when we eat too much of anything; carbohydrate, fat or protein. Again we also worry about 'good fat [HDL-C, omega-3], and bad fat [LDL-C]'. Peanut fats are good because they are unmodified and have useful contributions of omega-3, unfortunately deficient in an industrial diet. Peanuts have high amounts of monosaturates, useful for regularizing blood lipids and protecting from cardiovascular damage. Whole nuts 'burn slow', and help reduce appetite, diminishing cravings for calorie. In a natural diet, regular intake of peanut as an important part of the food mix along with regular exercise, help to lose weight. However, excess calories, from whatever source it may be - sugars, starches, fat, or oil - over and above body's energy expenditure, will be stored as fat. There is a common myth about peanuts that they are always fattening. But the fact is that nuts in themselves are not 'fattening'; lack of exercise and taking any carbohydrate or fat in excess amount is fattening. In the case of peanuts, raw uncooked is generally best. If roasted, it is wise to prefer dry roasting. Again, as a general rule, fresh and uncooked is best, even if not as tasty.

Synonymous with baseball games, circus elephants, chinabadam; the hardy, buttery and nutty taste of peanuts are ever popular worldwide. The name peanut is derived from the Bantu name "nguba" given to peanuts. In Bangladesh it is known as china-badam. Raw, roasted, shelled or unshelled, all forms of peanuts are available throughout the year. Due to their high protein content and its nutritional profile, peanuts are processed into a variety of food items like butter, oil, flour, and flakes. The peanut, *Arachis hypogea*, originates from semi arid areas of Brazil. It was spread to Asia by the Spanish, and

to Africa and then India by the Portuguese. It was introduced to USA from Africa. At present India, tropical Africa, and China are the leading peanut producing countries. The round 'Spanish' peanut has a full rich taste, and is usually used for roasting. The American 'Virginia' peanut is larger and oblong, and is commonly sold in-shell. It has a more 'nutty' flavor. The most common commercial variety is the redskin 'jumbo runner' in USA. They played an important role in the diet of the Aztecs and other Native Indians in South America and Mexico. Today, the leading commercial producers of peanuts are India, China, Nigeria, Indonesia and the United States

Whole peanuts are a very important human food. Of the fat content a major amount is omega - 3. Peanuts are a very good source of major B vitamins - B1 [Thiamine], B2 [Riboflavin], B3 (niacin), which protect us from deficiency disorders like beriberi, stomatitis and pellagra respectively. They also contain vitamin E (8mg/100gms). Peanuts are high in the bioflavonoid 'resveratrol' which is believed to help prevent the formation of arterial plaques. Peanuts have more resveratrol than grapes. Peanuts are surprisingly nutritious. 100 grams of dry roasted peanuts deliver about 600 kcal. One gets a better perspective of the calories provided by peanuts when one considers that the daily requirements of a 70 kg man with a sedentary lifestyle will be between 2200 to 2400 kcal. Thus, for such a person 100 grams of peanuts would supply about a fourth of his calorie requirements. Calories in peanuts are not empty calories; 100 grams of peanuts provide an average 17 gms of proteins. The recommended daily allowance for proteins is 0.8 gms per kg. For a 70 kg man this works out to 56 gms. Hence, 100 gms of peanuts would furnish a little less than a third of his recommended daily allowance [RDA] of his proteins.

Peanuts are also particularly rich in anti-oxidants, the new "mantra" for prevention for age related diseases and cancers. The anti-oxidant content of peanuts is higher than that of any fruits such as apples, carrot and beet and comparable to that of high anti-oxidant level of fruits such as strawberries. Roasted peanuts actually increase their anti-oxidant level by as much as 22%. Peanuts are a popular food item throughout the world. There has been a tendency to equate them with junk food because they do not usually form part of a proper meal. However, this is somewhat unfair to the peanut which is much more

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nutritious than generally assumed. Recent report also suggests that peanuts possess anti-oxidant effects and that they also protect the heart from ischemic disease, the number one cause of death worldwide. Previously, consumption of peanuts was considered unhealthy mainly on account of the high fat content. However, recent studies suggest that regular consumption of peanuts may actually be protective for the heart. The fats in peanuts are mainly mono-unsaturated in type. This is the very type of fats present in Mediterranean food which is believed to be healthier for the heart.

Peanuts are a very good source of monounsaturated fats, a heart-healthy diet. Studies have shown that peanuts and peanut butter decrease cardiovascular disease risk by 21%. In addition to their monounsaturated fat content, peanuts are good sources of vitamin E, niacin, folate and

magnesium. In addition, peanuts provide resveratrol, the phenolic antioxidant also found in red grapes and red wine that is thought to promote heart health. Trials have suggested that regular consumption of an ounce or two of peanuts help prevent development of ischemic heart disease. The total cholesterol and LDL cholesterol in blood are lowered while maintaining HDL cholesterol—the good or protective cholesterol level in blood. Studies adding even small amounts of 'peanut products' to the diet have recorded a 14% reduction in the 'bad' LDL cholesterol. The level of triglycerides, another type of fats also linked to heart disease, too reduces with regular consumption of peanuts. In addition, peanuts provide resveratrol, the phenolic antioxidant also found in red grapes and red wine that is thought to promote heart health. Trials have suggested that regular consumption of an ounce or two of peanuts.

Medical Jokes

Long and short of the problem

An elderly man was seated in the doctor's waiting room. When he was called in to see the doctor, he slowly got up, and, grasping his cane and hunching over, slowly made his way into the examining room.

After only a few minutes, the patient emerged from the room, walking completely upright. Another patient who had watched him enter into the room all hunched over, stared in amazement. 'That must be a miracle doctor in there.' he exclaimed. 'What treatment did he give you? What's his secret?'

The old man said, 'Well, the doctor looked me up and down, analysed the situation, and gave me a cane that was four inches longer than the one I had been using.'

Collected by

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