



Peanut butter a hearty choice

Is peanut butter as good for you as peanuts are? And are peanuts as healthful as other nuts?

Yes, peanut butter appears to offer the same health benefits that peanuts do. And peanuts, which are technically legumes, give you the same health benefits as true tree nuts, such as almonds and walnuts.

Several studies have shown that people who regularly eat nuts, including peanuts, or peanut butter are less likely to suffer from heart disease or type 2 diabetes compared with people who don't eat nuts or nut butters. Although the possibility exists that people who eat nuts are different from those who don't — perhaps they exercise more or have other healthy habits — nutrition experts believe that regular consumption of nuts can make a difference.

Likewise, some studies indicate that dieters who eat peanuts or peanut butter are more successful at weight loss than those who avoid them. This could be due to their high fat and protein content, which makes them more filling compared to high-carbohydrate foods.

But as with any kind of nuts and nut butters, moderation is key. A serving of peanut butter, as listed on Nutrition Facts labels, is two tablespoons. The next time you make a sandwich, measure that amount before you spread it on your bread. Do you typically use more? If so, try cutting back.

In the U.S. Dietary Guidelines, two tablespoons of peanut butter or

an ounce of nuts (about 28 peanuts) gives you the equivalent of 2 ounces of dietary protein. The guidelines recommend that most people eat about 5 to 6 ounces of protein a day. Knowing those numbers shows how easy it is to go overboard with nuts and nut butters if you don't measure to know how much you're consuming.

A few nutty things to keep in mind:

- An ounce of peanuts contains about 165 calories. Two tablespoons of peanut butter contain about 190 calories. Though high in fat, both have more unsaturated (healthy) fat than saturated fat. Similarly, both can be high in sodium when salted, but its effects on blood pressure are somewhat moderated by the generous amount of potassium in peanuts.

- Compare Nutrition Facts labels before choosing reduced-fat peanut butter. It normally has nearly as many calories as regular peanut butter, and has more sugar — something almost everyone should cut back on.

- Peanut butter may contain very small amounts of unhealthy trans fats because of the use of partially hydrogenated oil to make the peanut butter smoother. However, many brands are now processed using fully hydrogenated oils, which don't contain trans fats.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University's College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1043, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



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Note: Jan. 24 is National Peanut Butter Day.

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