

Nuts and their healthy smart fats



Yes nuts are high in fat, but fats are not bad news. Having some fat in our diets is important to provide the body with essential fatty acids, provide fat soluble vitamins, help regulate cholesterol production and provide stored energy and insulation.¹ The key in choosing foods is the right types of fats in the right amounts. Low fat diets like low carb diets are a thing of past.

Fats explained

There are three different types of fats in food, each having different health effects. These are classified into saturated fats and unsaturated fats (monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats). Each type of fat is made up of fatty acid building blocks and where ever there is fat in food you will find all three present but in different proportions.

- **Saturated fats** are found mostly in animal foods such as fatty meats, butter and full fat milk, but also in palm and coconut oil (often used in processed foods such as biscuits, chips, pastries and fast foods). Saturated fats are generally considered unhealthy as they can increase blood cholesterol particularly LDL cholesterol a risk factor for heart disease.²
- **Unsaturated fats**, found in fish and plant foods (such as nuts, seeds, avocado, their oils and spreads made from these oils) are healthy fats, which can improve blood cholesterol levels and reduce heart disease risk.² Polyunsaturated fats are found predominantly in

sunflower, safflower and soybean oils, margarine spreads made from these oils, as well as seeds and nuts (see below). Monounsaturated fats are found predominantly in olives, olive oil, canola oil and margarine spreads from these oils, avocado, and many nuts, nut spreads and oils (see below).

- You may have heard of **Trans fats** – these are a type of unsaturated fat, but due to their unusual structure behave more like a saturated fat. These are found in small amounts naturally in meat and dairy products but are mainly found as hydrogenated vegetable oils in foods like chips, biscuits, pastries and snack foods. Margarine spreads in Australia are virtually trans fat free. Surprisingly nuts do contain trace amounts of trans fats naturally but less than 0.3g per 100g. Trans fats increase the level of LDL cholesterol and reduce HDL cholesterol, increasing heart disease risk.² On average Australians eat less trans fat than the World Health Organisation recommends so we need to watch out for foods high in saturated fat instead.³

Essential fats and our health

Diets high in monounsaturated fat (such as a Mediterranean diet with plenty of olive oil, nuts and fish) have a number of health benefits, particularly for heart health and metabolic syndrome.^{4,5} Polyunsaturated fats can be further divided into **omega-6** and **omega-3** fatty acids, and omega-3 fats can be further divided into short chain omega-3 fats (from plants) and long chain omega-3 fats (from fish, seafood, Australian pasture fed meat, eggs and other fortified foods). Some polyunsaturated fats are essential fatty acids that must be eaten as they are required for normal growth and development but cannot be made by our body. These include the omega-6 fat linoleic acid (LA), the short chain omega-3 fat alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), and the long chain omega-3 fats eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexanoic acid (DHA). Essential fats play important roles in maintaining cell membranes, regulating many body processes including inflammation and blood clotting, and improving the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E and K from food.

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Fat content of individual nut varieties⁷

	Total Fat (g)	Saturated Fat (g)	Monounsaturated Fat (g)	Polyunsaturated Fat (g)	Omega-3 fat as ALA (mg)
Almond	54.7	3.7	35.9	12.8	0
Brazil Nut	68.5	14.8	21.8	29.0	0
Cashew	49.2	8.4	31.1	7.5	0
Chestnut	0.6	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Hazelnut	61.4	2.7	48.8	7.2	120
Macadamia	74.0	10.0	59.8	3.8	99
Peanut	47.1	7.0	22.9	14.9	n/a
Pecan	71.9	4.5	39.3	25.0	620
Pine Nut	70.0	4.2	23.0	39.8	0
Pistachio	50.6	5.8	26.7	15.8	0
Walnut	69.2	4.4	12.1	49.6	6280
Mixed Nuts	63.3	6.5	33.2	21.2	791

n/a = data not available

For further information on nuts and health refer to www.nutsforlife.com.au follow us @nutsforlife or like us at facebook.com/nuts4life

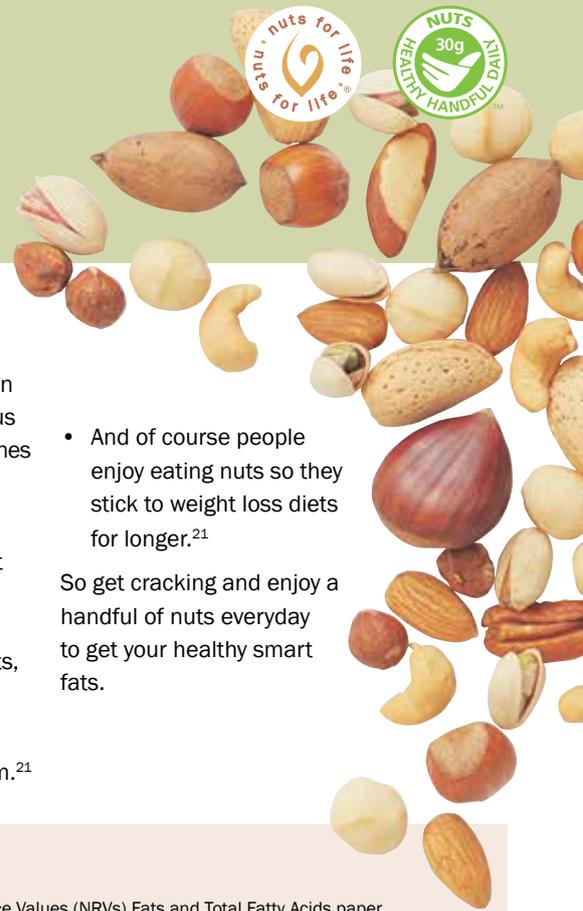
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Go Nuts for Life.
Go Nuts for Health.



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Essential fatty acids are also needed for brain and eye development, so vital during pregnancy, breastfeeding and in newborn babies.⁶

Fat in nuts

Most nuts (apart from chestnuts) are high in fat. Yet they contain more polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats, have a lower proportion of saturated fats and naturally contain trace amounts of trans fats. The fat profile of nuts varies from one type to another (see table 1) so including a variety of nuts in your diet ensures you have a good balance of healthy fats.

Almonds, cashews, hazelnuts, macadamias, peanuts, pecans and pistachios are higher in monounsaturated fats while Brazil nuts, pine nuts and walnuts have more polyunsaturated fats. Walnuts are one of the few plant foods that contain the essential omega-3 fat, ALA, with a handful (30g) of walnuts providing the recommended amounts of ALA. Smaller amounts are found in pecans, hazelnuts and macadamias. This is particularly important for vegetarians or anyone who doesn't eat fish or seafood as a small proportion of ALA can be converted into EPA in the body.⁸

Fats and weight management

Despite the type of fat all fats are high in kilojoules or energy. Eating too many kilojoules overall can lead to weight gain. This is why many people think nuts are off the menu if they are watching their waist. Interestingly most studies looking at regular nut consumption have not found this to be the case. Epidemiological studies (which have followed large groups of people over time) have found that regular nut eaters are less likely to be overweight than those who don't eat nuts.⁹⁻¹⁴ The Australian Dietary Guidelines state that consumption of nuts 65–110g is not associated with weight gain in the short term.¹⁵ So a daily 30g serve of nuts can be included in weight management diets.

Why is this the case?

- Nuts are satisfying as they contain protein and fibre so help control appetite.^{16, 17} Plus nuts increase the release of satiety hormones in the intestine making you feel full.¹⁸⁻²⁰
- Not all the fat in nuts is absorbed by the body – some studies have found that nut eaters excrete more fat – between 5 and 15% of the energy.²¹ Studies have also shown the more you chew or process nuts, the less fat is excreted.^{20, 22}
- The body appears to burn more energy when digesting nuts boosting metabolism.²¹
- And of course people enjoy eating nuts so they stick to weight loss diets for longer.²¹

So get cracking and enjoy a handful of nuts everyday to get your healthy smart fats.

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