

Pecans

Pecans are native to the southern United States and Mexico, and are probably best known as the key ingredient in **pecan** pie. Wild **pecan** trees grow up to 50 metres and can live and produce nuts for 150 years. Now grown in Australia, **pecans** are packed with a wide range of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and phytochemicals beneficial to health similar to fruit and vegetables. Enjoying a handful of nuts (30g) regularly as part of a healthy diet may reduce your risk of heart disease and type-2 diabetes, and can help with weight management.¹⁻⁵ So eat two serves of fruit, five serves of veggies and a handful of nuts every day. A 30g serve of **pecans** is equivalent to about 15 kernels. Have you had yours today?



Nutrition and health benefits of pecans

Pecans, with their range of important nutrients are a valuable addition to your diet, here's why:

- **A rich source of healthy fats** – pecans are high in healthy fats – both monounsaturated and polyunsaturated (89% of total fat).⁶ They have a lower proportion of saturated fat (6% of total fat), are free of trans fats, and like other plant foods do not contain dietary cholesterol.⁶
- **Contains plant sterols** – pecans contain about 30mg plant sterols in a 30g handful.⁶ About 2–3g of plant sterols a day may help reduce cholesterol re-absorption in the intestine and so can help lower blood cholesterol levels by

around 10%.⁷ Pecans can contribute to the total amount of plant sterols needed.

- **Improves blood cholesterol** – one study found that eating 68g of pecans each day reduced both total and 'bad' LDL cholesterol levels in those with normal blood cholesterol levels.⁸ In people with normal to moderately high cholesterol, substituting 20% of energy in a low-fat/low-cholesterol diet (the American Heart Foundation Step 1 Diet) with pecans (about 70g or two handfuls) led to a greater reduction of total cholesterol, LDL cholesterol and triglycerides while increasing levels of the 'good' HDL cholesterol.⁹ The reduction in LDL cholesterol on the pecan diet was double that of the low-fat/low-cholesterol diet. These findings are similar to other nut studies, showing a consistent lowering of LDL cholesterol with regular nut consumption.¹⁰
- **Prevents oxidation of LDL cholesterol** – one study found that including 100g of pecans as part of a meal led to a reduction in oxidised LDL following the meal.¹¹ Oxidation of LDL cholesterol, which causes LDL to become sticky, is a key step in atherosclerosis – the restricting and hardening of arteries.¹²
- **Contains plant omega-3 fats.** Along with a walnuts, hazelnuts and macadamias, pecans are one of the few plant foods which contain the plant omega-3 alpha linolenic acid (ALA) (620mg per 100g).⁶ ALA plays an important role in heart health.¹³
- **A rich source of antioxidants** – a study looking at the total polyphenol content of plant foods found pecans had the highest value of the fruits, vegetables, nuts and grains tested.¹⁴ Furthermore, including

pecans in a meal has been shown to increase antioxidant levels in the blood following the meal.^{11, 15}

- **A source of dietary fibre** – a 30g serve of pecans provides around 10% of the recommended dietary intake of fibre for adults.^{6, 16} Fibre plays an important role in appetite control, digestion, laxation and helps to reduce blood cholesterol by trapping cholesterol in the intestine and excreting it from the body.¹⁷

It's thought the combination of healthy fats, plant sterols, fibre, antioxidants and phytochemicals in pecans work together to promote heart health.

Pecans also ...

- **Contain plant iron and zinc** – important minerals for everyone and especially anyone following a vegetarian diet.^{6, 16} The absorption of plant iron from nuts can be increased by eating them with vitamin C rich foods such as citrus fruits or juices.

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Nutrient content of natural pecans⁶

Nutrient	Per 100g
Energy (kJ)	2973
Protein (g)	9.8
Fat, total (g)	71.9
Fat, saturated (g)	4.5
Fat, monounsaturated (g)	39.3
Fat, polyunsaturated (g)	25.0
Fat, omega-3 (mg) as ALA	620
Carbohydrate, total (g)	4.9
Carbohydrate, sugars (g)	4.3
Dietary fibre (g)	8.4
Sodium (mg)	3.0
Potassium (mg)	500
Iron (mg)	2.4
Zinc (mg)	3.9
Plant sterols (mg)	159
Total polyphenols (mg) ¹⁴	2016

For further information on the nutritional benefits of nuts and for recipes visit

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Go Nuts for Health.



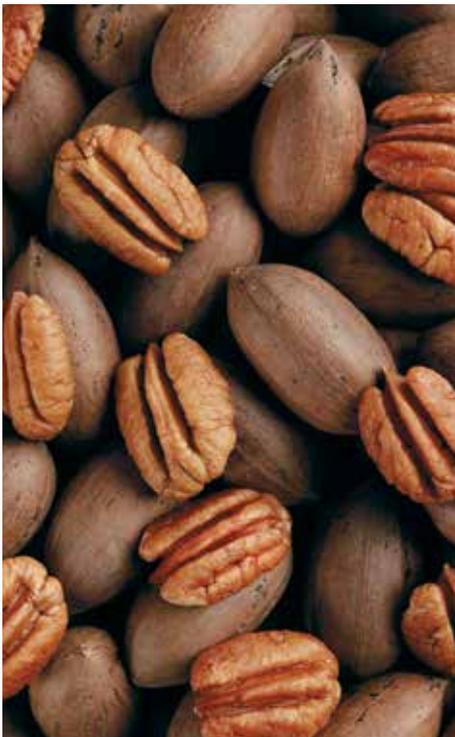
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- **Contain plant protein**⁶ – nuts such as pecans are sources of plant proteins important for vegetarians and anyone wanting to reduce their intake of animal protein. Pecans contain around 10g protein per 100g.
- **Help with weight management** – although high in fat, research has found that eating pecans (and other nuts) can help with weight management.¹⁻⁴ Two pecan studies looking at the effects of pecans on blood fats found that despite a higher fat intake, people did not gain weight eating around 70g of pecans over four to eight weeks when substituted for other foods.^{8,9} One study found eating pecans resulted in more fat being excreted from the body in stools.¹⁸ This may help explain why eating nuts may help with weight management.

Buying and storage tips

When choosing nuts, look for crisp, plump kernels. If buying them in the shell, select clean nuts free from cracks and holes. To keep them in the best condition, store them in an airtight container in the refrigerator or freezer. Nuts can be refrigerated for up to 4 months and frozen for up to 6 months. Bring the pecans back to room temperature before eating to maximise flavour.



8 ways to include pecans in your diet

- Pecans go well with chicken salads – try baby spinach, cherry tomato, fresh pear and chicken breast, topped with chopped pecans.
- Pecan pie – an traditional favourite.
- Pecans make a tasty addition to bread, cakes and muffins, increasing the fibre content.
- Combine ricotta or light cream cheese with chopped pecans and grated carrot for a change to your usual sandwich fillings.
- Pecans make an interesting twist on pesto – blend with basil, parmesan, garlic and olive oil.
- Sprinkle chopped pecans on your favourite breakfast cereal.
- Pasta with roasted vegetables and pecans – roast vegetables such as capsicum, eggplant, zucchini and pumpkin and toss through fettucine with a small amount of olive oil and lemon juice, topped with chopped pecans.
- Mix natural yoghurt with chopped pecans, pepitas and a sprinkle of your favourite dried fruit for a filling and tasty snack.

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