



# Eat Nuts & Seeds Daily

## CHALLENGE

**Eat at least 1 serving of nuts, seeds, or nut butter daily.**

## Requirements to Complete this HEALTH CHALLENGE™

1. Keep a mental or written record of how many servings of nuts, seeds, and nut butter you eat each day. Record this number on your monthly Health Challenge Calendar.
2. Read “What is a seed?” and “Important for your health.”
3. To complete the Challenge, eat a serving of nuts or seeds on at least 22 days this month.
4. Keep records of your completed Challenge in case your organization requires documentation.

## What is a seed?

In horticultural terms, a seed includes cereal grains (e.g., corn, rice, wheat, and oats), legumes (e.g., lentils, dry beans, and peas), nuts (e.g., almonds, macadamias, and walnuts), some spices (e.g., sesame and pomegranate seeds and seasonings like dill), and miscellaneous seeds like pumpkin seeds or pistachios. In this sense, seeds are the most important source of human food.

Cereal grains and legumes must be cooked or ground to make flour. This challenge focuses on what we generally think of as nuts and seeds because they can be consumed raw or cooked. They make great snacks and can be easily added to favorite dishes.

### One ounce of nuts or seeds is:

- Almonds, 24 nuts
- Almond butter, 2 tbsp
- Brazil nuts, 6-8 nuts
- Cashews, 18 nuts
- Flax meal, 1 rounded Tbsp
- Macadamia nuts, 10-12 nuts
- Peanuts, about 28 nuts
- Peanut butter, 2 Tbsp
- Pecans, 20 halves
- Pistachio nuts, about 47 nuts
- Sunflower seeds, ¼ cup
- Tahini (sesame butter), 2 Tbsp
- Walnuts, 14 halves



## Important for your health

Besides being tasty, nuts are a good source of energy, protein, fiber, and essential fatty acids. Nuts contain important nutrients such as riboflavin, niacin, magnesium, folic acid, niacin, vitamin E, and vitamin B6. They are high in copper, magnesium, and potassium, and are full of antioxidants and phytochemicals linked to reduced risk of heart disease and diabetes.

## Nuts and your heart

While animal fats contribute to heart disease, healthy fats – like the ones found in nuts – actually reduce the risk of heart attack. Nuts and seeds are rich in essential fatty acids and the kind of fat that lower the risk for heart disease—mono and polyunsaturated fats. Walnuts and flax meal are also high in n-3 fatty acid, which lowers the risk for sudden death from a heart attack.

The first study to show this effect was a study of 31,208 men and women living in California. In this study, researchers found that those who ate nuts 1-4 times each week had a 27% reduced risk of dying from heart disease compared to those who ate nuts less than once per week. Those who ate nuts 5 or more times each week cut their risk of death from heart disease in half. Later research on the same group of people showed that those who ate nuts daily lived nearly 3 years longer on the average than those who seldom ate nuts. In the Iowa Women’s Health Study, women who ate nuts frequently, compared to those who seldom ate nuts, reduced their risk of fatal heart disease by 57%.

In a dietary trial to reduce cholesterol, researchers divided people into 2 groups. One group was fed a low-fat diet. The other diet was similar except the participants ate higher levels of fiber, nuts (almonds), and seeds. After 1 month, those people eating the extra fiber, nuts, and seeds daily had significantly lower LDL (bad cholesterol) levels. The LDL cholesterol levels dropped 28.5% in people eating the nuts and seeds compared to only an 8% drop in the low-fat diet.

When researchers analyzed the results of 25 nut studies, they found that eating nuts lowered cholesterol and triglyceride levels. The average drop in total cholesterol was 11 mg/dL. LDL cholesterol levels dropped about 10 mg/dL. HDL levels actually rose slightly, although the change was not significant. The researchers also found that eating nuts reduced blood triglyceride levels by 21 mg/dL in those who had elevated triglycerides. All of these changes



reduce the risk of a heart problem. They found that different nuts used in the feeding trial (almonds, walnuts, peanuts, pistachios, pecans, and macadamias) all had beneficial benefits.

Almonds, walnuts, pecans, peanuts, hazelnuts (filberts), and pistachios can now carry a label saying they're good for your heart. Here are a few of the reasons researchers from Harvard believe nuts are good for your health:

- Nuts may help lower cholesterol, partly by replacing less healthy foods in the diet.
- Nuts contain mono- and polyunsaturated fats known to benefit the heart.
- The omega-3 fats found in walnuts may protect against irregular heart rhythms.
- Nuts are rich in arginine, a substance that may keep blood vessels relaxed and open and help prevent clotting.
- Nuts are also good sources of dietary fiber, magnesium, copper, folic acid, vegetable protein, potassium, and vitamin E, all of which are important for heart health.
- Nuts lower the risk of getting diabetes which increases heart disease too.



## Nuts and diabetes

Nuts are also helpful in preventing diabetes. In a large 16-year study, researchers looked at nut consumption and risk of developing diabetes. They found that women who ate nuts 5 or more times per week were 29% less likely to get diabetes compared to those who seldom ate nuts. A similar trend was seen for use of peanut butter. As peanut butter intake went up, diabetes risk went down!



## Nuts and weight gain

Some people suggest you not eat nuts because they are high in fat and will, therefore, make you fat. When researchers looked at this question they found that the women who ate the most nuts actually were less likely to be overweight than those who shunned nuts. The researchers suggested that, to prevent excess calories when you eat nuts, you reduce the intake of other high-calorie foods such as chips, snacks, and red meats.

## Seeds and health

Seeds contain protein, fiber, and vitamins and minerals that are important for health. Flaxseeds are associated with reduced risk of heart disease, stroke, cancer, and diabetes. Sunflower seeds are rich in fiber and folate. Pumpkin seeds are high in omega-3s and other important nutrients. Sunflower seeds are one of the richest sources of vitamin E. Sesame seeds contain manganese, copper, calcium, and other minerals and are associated with lower blood pressure and cholesterol.

## Nuts: dangerous to some

Any number of foods can cause a food allergy. However, peanuts (which are really a legume) are one of the main foods to cause severe anaphylaxis (a sudden drop in blood pressure that can be fatal if not treated quickly) in a small number of people who are allergic to peanuts. Tree nuts (e.g., walnuts, pecans) can also cause an allergic reaction. A food allergy happens when the person's body perceives a food as an enemy and wages war to rid it from the system. Food allergies cannot be cured. The only treatment is to avoid the offending food. A medical evaluation is the key to proper management of a food allergy. Even if you are allergic to walnuts, you most likely will be able to enjoy hazelnuts or almonds. Or, if you are allergic to some nuts, you might find sunflower or pumpkin seeds a viable option.



## Easy ways to eat more nuts and seeds

For optimal health, eat a variety of nuts and/or seeds daily: walnuts, hazelnuts (filberts), Brazil nuts, almonds, cashews, peanuts, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, sesame seeds, flaxseed, and non-hydrogenated butters such as peanut butter, almond butter, and tahini (sesame seed butter). Here's how you can have raw or roasted nuts available at most meals.

- Use nut spreads (peanut butter or almond butter) in place of butter or margarine.
- Give salads a crunch with sunflower seeds.
- Toss cashews or peanuts into curry.
- Put slivered almonds on vegetables.
- Include walnuts in your cookie and granola recipes.
- Top fruit parfaits with chopped nuts.
- Pack roasted pumpkin seeds for lunch.
- Add flax meal to your oatmeal and cookies.
- Add nuts and seeds to your cereal.
- Sprinkle sesame seeds on potato wedges and bake.
- Put peanut or almond butter on a fresh apple slice.
- Enjoy dark chocolate-covered almonds occasionally as a treat (dark chocolate is good for you in moderate amounts).

*Sources: Harvard University, 2011.; National Institutes of Health, 2011.; MyPyramid.gov, 2011.; Archives of Internal Medicine, 170(9):821-827 and 152(7):1416-1424.; Journal of the American Medical Association, 290:502-510 and 288:2554-2560.*





# Eat Nuts & Seeds Daily

## Instructions

1. Post this calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, etc.).
2. Use this calendar to record your exercise program (min/day as well as type of exercise), weekly weight, and any other items you may want to track.
3. At the end of the month, total the number of days you ate at least 1 serving of nuts, seeds, or nut butter. To meet this challenge, you must eat a serving of nuts and seeds on at least 22 days this month. Then keep up this health practice for a lifetime of best health!
4. Keep this record for evidence of completion.

**CHALLENGE**  
**Eat at least 1 serving of nuts, seeds, or nut butter daily.**

MONTH:							HC = Health Challenge	ex. min. = exercise minutes
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	Weight & weekly summary	
HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>		
ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____		
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ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____		

\_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I ate at least 1 serving of nuts, seeds, or nut butter

\_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I got 30+ minutes of physical activity such as brisk walking

## Other wellness projects completed this month:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

