

Walnuts

The nutrients in nuts help to boost your immune system and can help to lower cholesterol levels and hence protect against the risk of heart disease.

There is evidence that nut trees were being grown as a source of food as long ago as 10,000 BC; making them one of the earliest crops to be cultivated, perhaps even before cereals.

Most nuts are cultivated and grown specifically as a crop, except brazil nuts which are still harvested from the wild growing trees. The US, Turkey, Iran, China, France and Romania are the main growers of walnuts.

Walnuts are best purchased with the shell on to retain freshness. Because of their high polyunsaturated fat content walnuts are very perishable and are best stored in the fridge. You can add walnuts to meat dishes, salads, muesli, cakes and poultry stuffing. Ground walnuts can be used to make sweet pastries, cakes and biscuits.

The kernel is the bit of the nut that we eat. Walnuts are cholesterol-free but can provide a sizable contribution to our daily calorie and fat requirement. 6 whole walnuts gives us:

206 calories

20g fat divided between:

1.7g saturated fat, 3.7g monounsaturated fat, and 14.3g polyunsaturated fat;

2.2g omega-3 fat

3g protein

10% of adult man's requirement for iron

10% of adult's requirement for zinc

1/3 of adult's requirement for copper

Walnuts are an excellent source of the omega-3 fat alpha linoleic acid (2.2g in 6 walnuts). This essential fat helps to keep your heart healthy by reducing the 'stickiness' of blood, preventing clots and blockages in blood vessels and lowering blood pressure.

The linoleic acid, vitamin E and zinc in walnuts help to keep your skin smooth and soft by keeping it water-tight and well hydrated.

The main difficulty, apart from the high calorie and fat content, associated with nuts is their potential to cause severe allergies. Children are most at risk of nut allergies and peanuts are the biggest contributor to nut allergies.

Even though there is concern about the high calorie and fat content of nuts causing weight gain, current evidence suggests that, in fact, nuts promote a feeling of fullness and may help to prevent weight gain. Careful though, nuts tend to be very moorish and you can quickly pack away 300 calories in the blink of an eye.