

Nuts for Nutrition

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Can a handful of nuts a day help keep you healthy? And how much, exactly, is a handful?

Nuts and Your Health

The 2015 Dietary Guidelines All vegetables, fruits, whole grains, seafood, eggs, beans and peas, unsalted nuts and seeds, fat-free and low-fat dairy products, and lean meats and poultry—when prepared with little or no added solid fats, sugars, refined starches, and sodium—are nutrient-dense foods.

Choose MyPlate (a recommended food pattern to help people implement the dietary guidelines) states, “In general, 1 ounce of meat, poultry, fish, 1/4 cup cooked beans, 1 egg, 1 tablespoon of peanut butter, or 1/2 ounce of nuts or seeds can be considered as **“1-ounce equivalent”** from the Protein Foods Group.”

Nuts, with their healthy fats, are higher in calories than some other sources of protein and MyPlate recommends: “Choose unsalted nuts as a snack, on salads, or in main dishes. Use nuts to replace meat or poultry, not in addition to these items.” At the 2,000 calorie level, MyPlate recommends approximately 5-1/2 **“1-ounce equivalents”** from the Protein Group

A Handful of Nuts

How many nuts are in a handful of nuts? A handful equals about 1-ounce. This serving size corresponds to the serving size listed on the “Nutrition Facts” panel on food labels. The International Tree Nut Council Nutrition Research & Education Foundation gives these examples of the average number of nuts per 1-ounce portion.

- Almonds (20–24)
- Brazil Nuts (6–8)
- Cashews (16–18)
- Hazelnuts (18–20)
- Macadamias (10–12)
- Pecans (18–20)
- Pine Nuts (150–157)
- Pistachios (47–49)
- Walnuts (8–14)

Feel Like a Nut?

It’s easy to nibble on nuts. Here are two quick ideas. Store shelled or unshelled nuts in an airtight container in your refrigerator for up to 6 months or for a year in your freezer for best quality.

It’s in the Bag

You don’t have to fire up the stove or get out your cookbook to enjoy nuts. Your handful of nuts may be enjoyed — simply — out of hand.

Divide a container of nuts into small snack bags for easy snacking at home, office, or on the road. Simply count, weigh 1 ounce of nuts on a kitchen scale, or grab a handful and store in each snack bag. Keep in the refrigerator until you’re ready to enjoy! A handful of nuts may help you resist the gooey sweet roll in the breakroom at work.

Just a Sprinkle

Sprinkle nuts into these foods:

- Salads
- Yogurt
- Cereal
- Pasta
- Cooked vegetables
- Muffins and pancakes (toss a handful or two into your batter)

For added flavor, try toasting nuts. View directions for toasting nuts on next page.

Here’s a trail mix you can make with your favorite nut or combination of nuts.

Trail Mix

(16 servings • Serving size: 1/4 cup)

- 1 cup almonds**
- 1/2 cup chocolate chips or M&M’s**
- 1 cup dried fruit**
- 1/2 cup dried cranberries**
- 1 cup oatmeal squares**

Measure ingredients and put in a large zip-close bag. Shake to mix. Portion into single-serving zip-close bags.

Per serving: 140 calories, 20 grams (g) carbohydrate, 6 g fat, 3 g protein

Source: North Dakota State University Extension Service at www.ndsu.edu/eatsmart



Toasting Nuts and Seeds Using Microwave, Oven, or Stove-Top

Enjoy the health benefits of a daily handful of nuts or a couple of tablespoons of seeds by sprinkling them on cereal, yogurt, salads, soups, pasta, and vegetables. Toast them for added flavor. You can toast them using your microwave, oven, or stove-top.

Store any extra toasted nuts or seeds in an airtight container in the refrigerator for 1–2 weeks or freeze them in an airtight freezer container for 1–3 months.



Microwave toasting is easy for toasting smaller amounts of nuts and seeds.

Microwave Toasting

Here's a quick and cool way (with minimal clean-up) to toast nuts and seeds, based on information I received from Linda Gossett, MPA, CFCS, Extension Educator - EFNEP, University of Idaho. This has become my favorite method for toasting smaller amounts of nuts and seeds!

This method works well for amounts ranging from a tablespoon to 1/2 cup. With larger amounts, some are likely to turn dark quicker than others. The time will vary depending on the size, type, and temperature of the nuts/seeds and also may be influenced by the type of microwave.

1. Spread from a tablespoon to 1/2 cup nuts or seeds evenly in a single layer in a flat, microwave-safe dish, such as a 9-inch microwave-safe pie plate.
2. Add a small amount of soft butter or margarine or add a small amount of oil to the nuts/seeds. Use about 1/2 teaspoon fat per 1/2 cup of nuts/seeds; use proportionally less for smaller amounts of nuts/seeds. Stir the nuts/seeds to thinly coat with the fat. This small amount of fat helps with browning and speeds up the toasting process.
3. Microwave on high for 1 minute.
4. Stir and microwave for another minute.

5. Check to see how the toasting is proceeding. Add more microwave cooking time one minute at a time because nuts and seeds can burn quickly. Stir after each addition of time. Small amounts of thin nuts/seeds (sliced almonds or sesame seeds) could be finished at 2 minutes. Larger amounts of nuts, such as slivered or whole almonds, walnuts, pecans, and sunflower seeds will take an additional minute or two to become lightly browned and smell fragrant.

Oven Toasting

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Toast nuts BEFORE chopping them into smaller pieces.
3. Place nuts or seeds in a single layer in an ungreased shallow pan or RIMMED baking sheet such as a cookie sheet or jelly roll pan. (DO NOT use a baking sheet without sides. You may have nuts or seeds all over the oven if you accidentally tip the sheet when removing it from the oven.)
4. Bake 5–10 minutes or until they are GOLDEN brown. A toasted nut or seed may look more GOLDEN than BROWN. They will continue to brown slightly after they're removed from the oven. Stir once or twice or shake the pan during toasting to aid in even browning.
5. Remove from pan to cool.

NOTE: The first time you try toasting nuts or seeds, it's better to err on the side of under-toasting than over-toasting. As they toast, you'll notice a change in their fragrance as well as their color.

Stove-top Toasting

Stove-top toasting works well for small batches of nuts or seeds. With this method, the parts of the nuts or seeds touching the skillet may become darkest, unlike the oven method where they become more of an overall golden color.

1. Toast nuts BEFORE chopping them into smaller pieces.
2. Heat nuts or seeds in a dry, heavy skillet over medium heat for 1–2 minutes or until they're golden brown and they give off a rich, toasty fragrance. Watch them closely when using this method as it's easy to burn them.
3. Stir or toss nuts or seeds frequently for even toasting.
4. Remove from pan to cool.