

APRIL IS NATIONAL PECAN MONTH!

Heart-Healthy Pecans Not Just for Pies Anymore

A handful of pecans each day may help lower risk of cardiovascular disease

ATLANTA – Pecans are the only tree nut native to North America, so it's fitting that just a handful a day may help lower the risk of this country's number #1 killer: heart disease. According to the American Heart Association, cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in the United States and a major cause of disability. Fortunately for pecan-lovers, their favorite nuts contain an abundance of heart-healthy unsaturated fats.

"Since the vast majority of fat found in pecans is unsaturated, pecans are an ideal choice for anyone interested in maintaining a healthy diet," said Sue Taylor, R.D., nutrition communications director for the National Pecan Shellers Association.

A study published in *The Journal of Nutrition* suggests eating just a handful of pecans each day may be as effective at lowering cholesterol levels as prescription medication. In addition, research conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) shows pecans contain more antioxidants than any other nut and have one of the highest antioxidant capacity of any food. Antioxidants are nutrients that serve as armor for our bodies and may help slow the oxidation or "rusting" of LDL (bad) cholesterol. Studies have shown antioxidants may also decrease the risk of developing cancer, diabetes and neurological diseases such as Alzheimer's.

Snack on Pecans Instead

Pecans are a tasty and healthy substitute for traditional snack foods. These power-packed tree nuts contain more than 19 vitamins and minerals, and they're cholesterol-free. There's no better time to start eating healthy by substituting pecans for other snack food:

- Instead of chips, which are loaded with sodium, bring about 20 pecan halves to work to snack on throughout the day. Pecans are naturally sodium-free.
- Substitute pecans for a candy bar when you're looking for an afternoon pick-me-up. Research has shown people who eat pecans feel fuller longer. Pecans provide that long-lasting energy because they contain heart-healthy mono and polyunsaturated fats. Plus, a handful of pecan halves contain the same amount of fiber as a medium-sized apple.
- Sprinkle pecans on top of your yogurt and you'll get more zinc – an important nutrient for proper growth and strong immunity.

The National Pecan Shellers Association (NPSA) is an international trade association dedicated to educating culinary and health professionals, food technologists and the general public about the nutritional benefits, variety of uses and all-around great taste of pecans. For more information on the health benefits of pecans, plus photos and recipes, visit www.ilovepecans.org.

National Pecan Shellers Association

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