Am I too nuts for nuts? [1]

Dear Alice,

I just checked serving sizes for different kinds of nuts, and it turns out that I eat 500 to 1,500 calories worth of nuts every day. I eat a couple of different types (almonds, peanuts, cashews) and nut butters. I've never had a problem with this; I'm on the thinner size of average and feel relatively healthy. I know nuts are healthy for you, but can they be too much of a good thing?

Answer

Dear Reader,

A few things to consider: First, do the nuts and nut butters you’re eating have added salt or sugars? If so, you may want to look at your overall sodium [2] and sugar intake [3]. You can have too much of a good thing when it comes to salt and sugar. Second, how’s the rest of your diet? Are you eating lots of vegetables (don’t forget your greens)? What about whole grains and fruits? While the calories in nuts can meet your body’s energy needs and provide protein, fiber, and some vitamins, there are additional nutrients, vitamins, carbohydrates, and sugars that can only be found in vegetables, fruits, starches, and other protein sources. So, dear reader, depending on your answers to the questions above, the amount of nuts you consume may or may not help you achieve a balanced diet. If you’re not sure what a balanced diet looks like, head on over to ChooseMyPlate.gov [4] for more information.

Nuts provide a lot of nutritional benefits, not to mention convenience in the form of a quick and tasty snack. As you might already know, nuts are mostly made up of vegetable protein and unsaturated fat, as well as dietary fiber, vitamins, and minerals. Studies have shown that eating nuts lowers the risks of coronary disease and cardiac death, and reduces serum cholesterol levels and risk of type 2 diabetes in women.

Some may worry that too many nuts will contribute to weight gain, but that doesn’t sound like an issue for you. Weight gain is a result of calories in versus calories out. While nuts are a calorie-dense food, if the remainder of your diet is mostly low-calorie fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and some lean protein source, you probably aren’t eating more calories than you burn. The amount of calories you need is dependent on a number of factors, physical activity levels included. Eating nuts is even potentially protective against weight gain, as nuts can increase feelings of fullness and replace calories that would be consumed in other foods, leading to smaller and less frequent meals. Further, the number on the scale doesn’t necessarily indicate the health of a person [5]. If you feel good, are living an active lifestyle,
and consuming a balanced diet, your nutty obsession should be just fine. If you'd like to ask even more questions about your diet, you might consider making an appointment with a registered dietitian.

Enjoy and happy snacking!

Alice!

Category:
Nutrition & Physical Activity [6]
Food Choices & Health [7]
Optimal Nutrition [8]
Healthy Eating [9]

Related questions

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No time to cook? [12]
Ooh, baby, I like it raw (or, is a raw diet healthy?) [13]

Resources

Columbia Health Nutrition Services (Morningside) [14]
get balanced! Guide for Healthier Eating (Morningside) [15]
Student Health Service Nutrition Services (CUMC) [16]

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