Power a Plant-Based Diet with Peanuts

There are many types of plant-based diets from vegan and vegetarian diets, which do not include any meat, to Mediterranean-style diets that contain some meat and significant amounts of plant-based foods. A plant-based diet is one that consists of mainly vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds; which includes peanuts, peanut butter, and peanut oil.

Research shows that plant-based diets are associated with lower BMIs, increased nutrient intake, and a reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes.1-5 A recent study shows that vegetarian diets are associated with lower death rates. In addition, vegetarians who consumed nuts and peanuts had a lower risk of heart disease than non-nut eating vegetarians.5,6

Peanut oil…

is a plant oil found in the Herbs, Spices, and Plant Oils section of the pyramid. It is high in heart healthy fats, low in saturated fats, and also contains vitamin E and phytosterols, all shown to benefit heart-health and reduce the risk of disease like cardiovascular disease and cancer.8-9

Peanuts & Peanut Butter…

can be found in the Nuts, Peanuts, Seeds, Peanut/Nut Butters section. Peanuts are the most commonly eaten nut and, when including peanut butter, they account for 2/3 of all nuts eaten in the U.S.10 In plant-based diets, they represent a source of healthy oils and a nutrient-dense, protein-rich plant food that can easily be incorporated daily.

Where do peanuts fall in the pyramid?

Oldways Vegetarian Network has created a new Vegetarian & Vegan Pyramid, reviewed and updated by a scientific committee, which includes a prestigious group of nutrition researchers and numerous nutrition experts.7 The pyramid highlights plant-based foods that should be included in the diet daily and includes peanuts, peanut butter, and peanut oil in two of the tiers.
Peanuts and peanut butter contain more protein than any other nut and are one of the most popular plant-proteins consumed in the U.S. A 1-ounce handful of peanuts contains about 8g of protein, which is more than most cereal-based grains and comparable to a serving of beans.

Unlike animal based proteins, peanut protein is low in cholesterol and saturated fat, and contains many beneficial nutrients like fiber, vitamins, minerals, and bioactives shown to help reduce the risk of many diseases.\(^8,12\) Peanut protein is a favorite food that is both affordable and convenient; and with most households already keeping peanut butter in their cupboard, making the switch to plant-based eating becomes even easier.

### Reduced Risk of Disease

Numerous studies show that eating a vegetarian or plant-based diet can help reduce the risk of many diseases and even assist with weight maintenance.\(^1,2\) Plant-proteins, like peanuts, are associated with reduced cholesterol and lowered blood pressure. Furthermore, studies show replacing red meat with a plant protein, like peanuts, can decrease the risk of stroke, mortality, and type 2 diabetes.\(^13-17\)

In fact, research from several major studies shows eating a handful of peanuts daily can cut the risk of heart disease by about 50%.\(^11\) In one study, obese mice on a high cholesterol diet fed peanut protein flour had decreased cholesterol.\(^14\) In addition, peanuts are very high in Arginine, a vasodilator that helps to open up blood vessels and improve blood flow, which may contribute to decreased blood pressure.\(^18\) In fact, peanuts contain more Arginine than any other food.\(^12\) They are also very low in lysine, giving them a beneficial Arginine to lysine ratio; studies show that a positive arginine:lysine ratio has been associated with lower levels of cholesterol.\(^20\)

### Protein Plus…

Peanuts are a nutrient dense plant protein that pack a lot of nutrition. “The peanut package” includes high amounts of healthy oils and fiber and contains many bioactives and over 30 essential nutrients for health.\(^12\) The combination of peanut protein, fiber, healthy oils, and nutrients may account for why peanuts significantly reduce the risk of many diseases and also contribute to increased satiety and weight maintenance.\(^21\) In addition, research has shown that plant proteins may help reduce the risk of certain cancers, and more recent research shows young girls who eat peanut butter may reduce their risk of breast disease.\(^4,22\)

### Did you know

An NHANES analysis of vegetarian diets indicated that vegetarians have low intake of zinc, niacin, and protein.\(^23\) Peanuts contain more protein than any other nut, are a good source of zinc, and an excellent source of niacin. They are also high in fiber, vitamin E, magnesium, phosphorus, copper, thiamin and manganese. \(^12\) As a nutrient-dense plant protein, peanuts and peanut butter fit well into a vegetarian diet and can offer affordable and tasty nutrition that’s needed.
USD’s MyPlate shows that peanuts and peanut butter can fit into any healthy diet. Peanuts are considered part of the protein group, which should make up roughly a quarter of your plate and 15-35% of your daily calorie intake. Nuts are highlighted as a great source of protein for vegetarian diets and non-vegetarian diets, and are also considered a healthy fat for weight management and reduced disease risk.24

In addition, the 2010 the Dietary Guidelines recommends a plant-based diet with good sources of plant protein and encourages a healthy eating pattern that emphasizes nutrient-dense foods like nuts and peanuts.25 It also highlights healthy unsaturated fats, such as those found in peanuts, peanut oil, and peanut butter, to reduce disease risk. Fiber, healthy fats, and healthy protein are also recommended for weight management, all of which can be found in peanuts.

Research by NHANES shows that peanuts can improve overall diet quality by increasing intake of fiber and many vitamins and minerals including vitamin E, folate, magnesium, and zinc; research with adolescents also showed increased nutrient intake and better diet quality among peanut eaters compared to non-peanut eaters.26

The Mediterranean Diet is Plant-Based

The Mediterranean diet emphasizes a higher intake of vegetables, legumes, fruits, nuts, whole grains, cheese or yogurt, fish, and monounsaturated fat. A meta-analysis of 600 studies showed that the Mediterranean-style diet is one of the most beneficial diets in improving the risk of heart disease.27 This is likely due to its high content of monounsaturated fats and nuts, which have both shown similar heart-health effects.

Peanuts are high in monounsaturated fat and a great fit with this diet as it recommends higher intakes from healthy fats and protein sources like nuts and peanuts. Nuts have been a part of the Mediterranean lifestyle since pre-historic times and have been used in the past by different civilizations as medicine to prevent or treat certain diseases.28 A major study using the Mediterranean diet and nuts/peanuts showed a decrease in blood pressure, cholesterol, and insulin resistance among participants, as well as an inverse relationship with metabolic syndrome.29 Research also showed Mediterranean diets, including nuts and peanuts, may improve cognition.30 Recent research showed that a Mediterranean diet including frequent nut and peanut consumption significantly reduced the risk of mortality in populations at high cardiovascular risk.31

Peanuts also contain the same powerful antioxidant found in red wine called resveratrol, which has been shown to benefit heart function, weight loss, decreased risk of cancer and diabetes, and reduced mortality risk.32,33 Most of the resveratrol in peanuts is found in the skins. In fact, southern-style boiled peanuts contain more resveratrol than red wine and peanut butter is not to far behind.32
Peanut Power: How to Get Your Daily Dose

Many studies show that eating a serving of peanuts or peanut butter 1 to 2 times a day can benefit health. Try adding a scoop of peanut butter to warm oatmeal in the morning or using peanut butter to create a healthy Thai peanut sauce for noodles. You can even warm up peanut butter in the microwave and drizzle it over yogurt for added flavor. Peanuts make a great substitution for croutons on a salad and add a nice crunch when sprinkled onto stir-fries or tossed in a sandwich wrap. For more information and recipes please visit www.peanut-institute.com

References