



PECANS ARE FDA APPROVED FOR A HEART HEALTHY DIET

Consumers who think a healthful diet is bland and boring should think again. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently approved a health claim for pecans and other nuts regarding their role in helping to reduce heart disease - confirming that a heart-healthy diet can include good-tasting foods such as pecans. Nuts, including pecans, can now carry the following health claim:

"Scientific evidence suggests but does not prove that eating 1.5 ounces per day of most nuts, such as pecans, as part of a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol may reduce the risk of heart disease. (See nutrition information for fat content.)"



"More than 30 studies have shown that including nuts in the diet can reduce the risk of heart disease regardless of the individual nut studied," noted Guy Johnson, Ph.D., nutrition consultant to the International Tree Nut Council Nutrition Research & Education Foundation. In particular, several recent studies have shown that pecans can reduce the risk of heart disease by lowering cholesterol levels, particularly LDL cholesterol or bad cholesterol.

"This new health claim is great news for pecan lovers. Consumers have known all along that pecans taste good, but this health claim can now help increase consumer awareness of the heart-healthy benefits of pecans," noted Beth Hubrich, a registered dietitian with the National Pecan Shellers Association.



Pecans: full of protein, nutrients and good fats

Pecans contain mainly heart-healthy fats - over half the fat (about 60%) found in pecans is monounsaturated fat and approximately another 30% is polyunsaturated fat. This means that almost 90% of the fats (oils) in pecans are heart-healthy. Eating a handful of pecans also provides nutrients such as vitamin A, folic acid, calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, zinc and several B vitamins. Pecans also contain a significant amount of gamma tocopherol - a unique form of vitamin E that can benefit intestinal health and have a protective effect for prostate cancer, according to research studies. Pecans are naturally cholesterol-free and sodium-free, and one serving provides about 10% of the daily value for zinc and fiber.

One of the recent studies on pecans, conducted at Loma Linda University and published in *The Journal of Nutrition*, found that pecans help lower cholesterol better than a traditional low-fat, heart-healthy diet. In the study, the pecan-enriched diet lowered LDL cholesterol levels by 16.5%, which was more than twice as much as the Step I diet (the diet recommended by the American Heart Association as the first line of therapy for individuals with elevated cholesterol levels). Similarly, the pecan-enriched diet lowered total cholesterol levels 11.3%, twice as much as the Step I diet.

Pecans can help with weight control

Pecans may help lower cholesterol while adding flavor, but what about the fat? The Loma Linda researchers reported that although the Step I diet contained approximately 28% fat and the pecan-enriched diet contained 39.6% fat, study participants on the higher-fat pecan diet did not gain weight. The researchers concluded that pecans, which add "good fat" to the diet, may actually help people feel fuller so that they eat fewer calories in their diet overall.