

Health Insights Today

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Nutrition News

By Daniel Redwood, DC

Nuts Decrease Heart Disease Risk

Adding nuts to your diet won't help you lose weight, but it may well be good for your health. Spanish researchers writing in *Archives of Internal Medicine* report that for people on a Mediterranean diet, adding nuts was better than adding more olive oil in terms of decreasing heart disease risks associated with metabolic syndrome. This is especially true when a small number of nuts are used as a replacement for a snack of chips or crackers. Subjects in the study who fared best ate about three whole walnuts, seven or eight whole hazelnuts and seven or eight whole almonds daily. They showed a decrease in abdominal fat and improvements in cholesterol and blood pressure.

Reference: Salas-Salvado J, Fernandez-Ballart J, Ros E, et al. Effect of a Mediterranean Diet Supplemented With Nuts on Metabolic Syndrome Status: One-Year Results of the PREDIMED Randomized Trial. *Arch Intern Med.* 2008;168(22):2449-2458.

Whole Grains Decrease Risk of Heart Failure, While Eggs and Full Fat Dairy Increase It

Researchers reporting on the massive Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities (ARIC) study in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* find that increased intake of whole grains such as oatmeal or grits, whole-grain cold cereal, and whole-grain or dark bread are associated with a decreased risk of heart failure, but that eggs and full-fat dairy products such as whole milk, cheese, and ice cream increase that risk. The health risks of eggs were also the subject of a recent study in *Diabetes Care* which found that as little as one egg per week is associated with an increased risk of diabetes, and that this risk rises substantially as the number of eggs per week increases.

Nettleton JA, Steffen LM, Loehr LR, Rosamond WD, Folsom AR. Incident Heart Failure Is Associated with Lower Whole-Grain Intake and Greater High-Fat Dairy and Egg Intake in the Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities (ARIC) Study. *J Am Diet Assoc* 2008; 108: 1881-1887.

Djousse L, Gaziano JM, Buring JE, Lee IM. Egg Consumption and Risk of Type 2 Diabetes in Men and Women. *Diabetes Care.* Nov 18 2008. [Epub ahead of print]

Vitamin D Protects the Heart

In the past ten years, our understanding of the role of Vitamin D has expanded well beyond its role in helping the body absorb calcium. A review of research in *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, authored by James H. O'Keefe, MD, director of preventive cardiology at the Mid America Heart Institute in Kansas City, found that low Vitamin D levels correlate with high blood pressure and diabetes and also with inflammation, which plays a crucial role in heart disease. Sources of vitamin D include exposure to sunlight, fish liver oil, supplements, and fortified foods such as milk, soymilk, orange juice, infant formula, cheese and breakfast cereal.

Lee JH, O'Keefe JH, Bell D, Hensrud DD, Holick MF. Vitamin D Deficiency: An Important, Common, and Easily Treatable Cardiovascular Risk Factor? *J Am Coll Cardiol.* 2008;52(24):1949-1956.

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Supplements of Vitamins E and C May Protect Against Bone Loss

In a small but promising pilot study of postmenopausal women, 600 IU of Vitamin E and 1000 mg of Vitamin C taken daily for six months protected against bone loss at a level equal to that attained from a session of resistance exercises three times a week. Small studies cannot be taken as proof, but they often provide a basis for undertaking larger research projects that can better resolve the remaining uncertainties. This study appears to be the first of its kind.

Chuin A, Labonte M, Tessier D et al. Effect of antioxidants combined to resistance training on BMD in elderly women: a pilot study. *Osteoporos Int*. Nov 20 2008 [Epub ahead of print]

FDA and EPA Clash Sharply Over Safety of Eating Fish

Because fish contain significant levels of mercury from pollution, the U.S. federal government for many years has recommended that pregnant women and young children limit their consumption of fish for health reasons. These guidelines were jointly endorsed by the Food and Drug Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency in 2004.

Now, the two federal agencies are at loggerheads over whether to change this health advisory. The Food and Drug Administration has been circulating a draft report within the government that argues the health benefits of eating fish outweigh the potential ill effects of mercury. The Environmental Protection Agency, in sharp contrast, is calling the FDA opinion “scientifically flawed and inadequate,” recommending that current advisories remain in force.

CBS News, “Debate Rages on Risk of Mercury in Fish.” http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/12/12/health/main4667226.shtml?source=RSSattr=Health_466726. Accessed 12/16/08.

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