

PISTACHIOS ARE HEART HEALTHY



Evidence shows that a diet incorporating tree nuts, such as pistachios, is associated with a reduced risk of cardiovascular disease.

In a 2008 study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, researchers assigned three diets to individuals with moderately elevated LDL cholesterol levels:

- Step I Diet control group without pistachios;
- Step I Diet with one dose of pistachios a day at 10 percent of total calories;
- Step I Diet with two doses of pistachios a day at 20 percent of total calories.

The one and two dose pistachio diets lowered harmful LDL cholesterol by nine to 12 percent, respectively. HDL cholesterol levels were higher in women following the two dose pistachio diet.¹



Rich in the Amino Acid Arginine

In an article from Harvard's Department of Nutrition, Dr. Frank Hu states that nuts have favorable effects on blood lipids, and may protect against coronary artery disease through other mechanisms such as arginine. Pistachios are rich in the amino acid arginine, which is a precursor of nitric oxide; a potent vasodilator that can inhibit platelet aggregation and adhesion. This study proposes that the antiatherogenic effect of nuts might be related to the arginine-nitric oxide pathway.²



The Best Nut Source of Phytosterols

Pistachios offer the richest source of phytosterols (plant sterols with a similar structure to cholesterol) among tree nuts.³ It is believed that these components lower the absorption of dietary cholesterol from other foods.⁴



Good Source of Heart Healthy Fats

While pistachios are a rich source of dietary fat (14 grams per 30 gram serving), almost 90 percent of the fat is of the unsaturated type. Monounsaturated fat comprises 55 percent of the fat in pistachios; 32 percent is polyunsaturated. Both types of fat reduce blood cholesterol levels and lower the risk of heart disease when replacing saturated fats in the diet.⁵ Pistachios have no trans fat, which is found mainly in partially-hydrogenated oils.



Rich in Antioxidants

In a study conducted at Penn State University, subjects with high cholesterol were assigned three different diets consisting of 1.5 or three ounces of pistachios a day, or a heart healthy (Step I) diet without pistachios. After one month, cholesterol levels were significantly lower among the pistachio eaters. Eating three ounces of pistachios a day cut cholesterol levels by 8.4 percent, with LDL cholesterol dropping by 11.6 percent. Researchers also noted increased levels of lutein, beta-carotene and gamma-tocopherol in the pistachio-rich diets and stated that lutein may improve CVD risk by reducing oxidized LDL.⁶



The Heart Healthy Seal of Approval

“Scientific evidence suggests, but does not prove, that eating 1.5 ounces per day of most nuts, such as pistachios, as part of a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol, may reduce the risk of heart disease.”

- Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

References:

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