Pistachios and Heart Disease

The 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend nuts, such as pistachios, as a nutrient-rich snack to include in a healthy diet. Pistachios also are mentioned as a protein-rich food that can contribute to improved nutrient intake and health benefits. Specifically, "moderate evidence indicates that eating peanuts and certain tree nuts (e.g., walnut, pecan, and pistachio) reduces risk factors for cardiovascular disease when consumed as part of a diet that is nutrient-dense and within calorie limits." 2, 3

In February 2013, the landmark PREDIMED study published in the New England Journal of Medicine showed a Mediterranean diet supplemented with nuts, such as pistachios, significantly reduced cardiovascular events. In this clinical trial of about 7400 subjects, those who ate a Mediterranean diet with either 1 ounce of nuts per day or 1 liter of olive oil per week had a 35% risk reduction in heart disease-related events. Importantly, this risk reduction was the same as for statins, which are cholesterol-lowering drugs.

Pistachios likely reduce overall heart disease risk beyond just a decrease in total and LDL cholesterol alone. Numerous studies have looked at the effects of eating pistachios on many risk factors for cardiovascular disease. 1-5

These studies suggest eating pistachios daily (1 to 3 ounces or an 80%-200% of calories) may reduce the risk of heart disease in the following ways:

1. Lowering total cholesterol, LDL cholesterol, and non-HDL cholesterol
2. Increasing antioxidants in the blood and decreasing oxidized-LDL
3. Decreasing small dense LDL and increasing polyunsaturated levels in the blood
4. Providing beneficial anti-inflammatory properties
5. Reducing acute stress by lowering blood pressure, heart rate, and peripheral vascular resistance.

Subjects who ate a Mediterranean diet with either 1 ounce of nuts per day or 1 liter of olive oil per week had a 30% risk reduction in heart disease-related events—the same risk reduction achieved by statins (cholesterol-lowering drugs).


Published in 2010 in the Archives of Internal Medicine, a proslized analysis of 13 studies suggests eating nuts, such as pistachio, has a total and LDL blood-cholesterol-lowering effect, further confirming the evidence that regular nut consumption can lower the risk of coronary heart disease. 6

Two other PREDIMED study papers, published in 2013 in the Public Library of Science (PSS) and PSS Clinical Nutrition, presented cross-sectional data from the beginning of the trial. Both assessed 7116 subjects and the association between the frequency and amount of nuts participants ate. Those subjects who ate more than three servings of nuts, including pistachios, per week had a 15% lower mortality rate. Notably, the researchers also found similar reductions for cancer and cardiovascular mortality risk. A second cross-sectional analysis showed those subjects who ate more than three servings of nuts, including pistachios, per week had a lower incidence of diabetes, including abdominal obesity, metabolic syndrome, and diabetes. 7, 8

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

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