

Bring on the Pecans: NMSU Researchers Find Eating Pecans Lowers Bad Cholesterol

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LAS CRUCES - Eating two handfuls of pecans a day can lower rates of the bad cholesterol linked to heart disease, New Mexico State University researchers reported in this month's issue of the Journal of the American Dietetic Association.

"The research shows that we don't have to be afraid of pecans and the fat in pecans," said Wanda Morgan, a nutritional scientist with NMSU's Agricultural Experiment Station. "Pecans can be part of a balanced and varied diet."

Morgan and former graduate student Beverly Clayshulte conducted an eight-week study, funded by NMSU's Agricultural Experiment Station and a grant from the Western Pecan Growers Association.

The researchers found that eating about three-quarters of a cup of pecans a day lowered the so-called bad cholesterol (LDL or low density lipoprotein cholesterol) by 10 percent after four weeks and by 6 percent after eight weeks. Total cholesterol was lowered as well.

"We just are really excited about this because pecans taste so good and to find out that they're good for you, too, is good news for our pecan growers and good news for the general public as well," Morgan said.

The research adds to a growing body of knowledge that counters notions that people should avoid eating nuts. Similar studies have been conducted with almonds and walnuts.

"Nuts were really getting beat up on," Morgan said. "Nutritionists and other health care professionals were telling folks to stay away from nuts because they are high in fat."

It's true that nuts are high in fat and calories. Pecans, for example, are 53 percent fat by weight. Three-quarters of a cup (about 68 grams) contains 459 calories and 47 grams of fat. But 29 grams of that comes in the form of monounsaturated fat-- the good fat that contributes to a balanced and varied diet, Morgan explained.

"We don't have to run away from pecans," she said. "We just need to keep in mind the amount of fat they contain and balance that with the total amount of calories and fat we consume during the day."

Pecans also are high in vitamin E and provide an extra dose of fiber, Morgan added.

In the study, participants in the treatment group were told to eat their daily pecan rations either as snacks or incorporated in their regular meals. They were not allowed to eat any other nuts during the study. Participants assigned to the control group were told to eat as they usually do, except to avoid all nuts.

"We had people come up with all kinds of interesting ways to work the pecans into their diets," Morgan said. "Folks had them for breakfast on cereal and pancakes. They sprinkled them on salads. Some even took them to Dairy Queen and had them put into Blizzards."

Morgan's study differed from other nut studies in that participants were allowed to choose what they ate, instead of following a restricted, laboratory-type diet. "We wanted to mimic as much as we could what people really did with their daily meals to see if we could still get some of the benefits that were showing up with the other studies."

Also in Morgan's study, participants ate a more modest amount of nuts than in the other nut studies. In future research, she plans to find out if even smaller amounts of pecans will lower cholesterol. "We want to find out where that dotted line in the sand is for seeing a benefit from pecan consumption."

Other articles relating to this story:

- [Good News for Nuts: Pecans Lower Cholesterol Levels](http://www.healthscout.com), HealthSCOUT Network: <http://www.healthscout.com>
- [Good News about Pecans: They're Delicious and Heart Healthy](http://www.healthwatch.com) CBS HealthWatch by Medscape: <http://www.healthwatch.com>
- [Cholesterol: Pecans Can Help](http://www.abqjournal.com) Albuquerque Journal: <http://www.abqjournal.com>