

EXPERT STATEMENT



The Cardiovascular Benefits of Walnuts

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Eating walnuts provides many heart health benefits. Numerous studies have shown that eating walnuts as part of a healthful diet can lower blood cholesterol levels, improve the function of arteries, reduce blood pressure, and reduce inflammation. In fact, walnuts were the first whole food to receive a heart health claim from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

There are many components of walnuts that may provide cardiovascular benefits, but there's one substance unique to walnuts: omega-3 fatty acid. Walnuts are the only nut that contain significant amounts of alpha-linolenic acid, the vegetable omega-3 fatty acid.

The omega-3s in walnuts have been proven to increase the clearance of LDL or "bad" cholesterol from the blood, are probably related to improved dilation of the arteries, and may be associated with lower blood triglycerides. Triglycerides are fatty compounds that, when circulating in increased quantities in blood, may increase the risk of a heart attack.

When people regularly eat walnuts more omega-3s are incorporated into their LDL particles. This change encourages cells in the liver to remove the LDL cholesterol from the blood, which in turn reduces the amount of LDL in the blood that can clog arteries and lead to coronary heart disease.

The average change in LDL cholesterol in eight feeding trials suggests that for every two walnut halves consumed, LDL or "bad" cholesterol will drop 1%. From other studies we know that for every 1% drop in LDL cholesterol, there is a 2% decrease in coronary heart disease risk.

I tell my patients to eat a handful of walnuts every day. Walnuts not only protect heart health, they also add great flavor to a variety of dishes. My favorite way to eat walnuts is to eat them raw as a snack right out of my hand.