



Another Reason to Love Pecans: The American Heart Association Certifies Pecans As Heart Healthy Food

Pecans are now designated as heart-healthy when enjoyed as part of a healthy eating pattern by the American Heart Association's Heart-Check Certification Program (www.heartcheckmark.org), according to the National Pecan Shellers Association (NPSA), a non-profit association dedicated to increasing public awareness of the benefits of pecans (www.ilovepecans.org). Unroasted and unsalted pecan halves and pieces grown in the U.S. and marketed by members of the NPSA can now use the Heart-Check mark to notify consumers that they meet the program's nutritional guidelines, including criteria for saturated fat and sodium.

Dr. Rachel Johnson, Ph.D., R.D., the Bickford Green and Gold Professor of Nutrition at the University of Vermont and an American Heart Association spokesperson said, "We know that consumers have relied on the American Heart Association's Heart-Check mark to easily identify heart-healthy foods for more than 15 years. Adding nuts, fish and other foods that are rich sources of good fats, monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, enhances the program and gives more healthy options consumers can choose with the same trust factor.

"Pecans stay with you longer than high carbohydrate snacks that your body burns through quickly," said Vickie Mabry, NPSA Executive Director. "With antioxidants as well as a tender texture, rich buttery flavor and gentle crunch, pecans make an ideal snack choice for everyone," she added.

Heart-Check Mark

The American Heart Association's HeartCheck Food Certification Program was launched in 1995 to help grocery shoppers quickly and easily identify heart-healthy foods that can be incorporated into a sensible eating pattern. In order to earn this designation, nuts must meet certain nutritional requirements for saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, sodium and beneficial nutrients. Today, the red and white heart healthy symbol has become the one of the most trusted and well-known nutrition icons representing heart-healthy eating.

Health Benefits of Pecans

Findings from a 2001 study conducted at Loma Linda University showed that adding just a handful of pecans to your diet each day may help inhibit unwanted oxidation of blood lipids, thus helping prevent coronary heart disease. Pecans also offer many other health benefits.

Cholesterol

Pecans also play a role in reducing the risk of heart disease because they have an abundance of "good" heart healthy fats. These unsaturated fats can have a protective effect by lowering total blood cholesterol when eaten in moderation. Pecans contain no cholesterol and no trans-fat.

Vitamins

Pecans contain more than 19 vitamins and minerals – including vitamin A, vitamin E, folic acid, calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, several B vitamins and zinc. One ounce of pecans provides 10 percent of the recommended Daily Value for fiber. Pecans are also a natural, high-quality source of protein that contains very few carbohydrates and no cholesterol and are naturally sodium-free.

Ways to Incorporate Pecans into a Healthy Lifestyle

Pecans are easy to add to your eating plan; simply grab a handful! Pecans are healthy and delicious, and just a one-ounce serving (15- 20 pecan halves) packs the nutrients to keep you going. They're a perfect snack for both children and adults.

Often associated with indulgences and occasional treats, pecans can also be eaten in healthier forms and cooked or baked in a wide variety of foods to add flavor and nutrition. Delicious recipes can be found or created using pecans for breakfast, salads, entrees and side dishes.

Pecan recipes and downloadable images of foods incorporating pecans can be found at www.ilovepecans.org.