

Nuts to the F-word

By Johan Leech

Warning: this article may contain traces of tree nuts.

Ok – all jokes and puns aside – it’s fair to say that a lot of us are still overly cautious about including nuts as a regular part of our diet. Somewhere during the low-fat diet hype of the 80s and 90s, nuts were labelled the F word-“fattening”.

Despite new clinical evidence that indicates regular nut consumption can actually help *combat the kilos*, the “fattening” label still rules true. Quite frankly, it’s even more old-school and outdated than Myspace, and this is why.

It may seem contradictory at first – kilojoule-dense nuts playing a crucial role in the fight against the fat – but the newest research indicates that eating 1-2 handfuls (30-50g) of unsalted tree nuts per day does not cause weight gain [1]. In fact, it can even *reduce* our risk of obesity [2].

Nuts are best eaten as part of an isocaloric diet – that is, it’s best to swap them in for less nutritious foods we regularly eat rather than just adding them into the mix.

Let me first clear any misunderstanding. I’m not saying tree nuts are a low-energy food, because they do in fact contain high quantities of mono- and poly-unsaturated fats

(the healthier fats). The twist in the tale comes when we eat nuts, as the human body is unable to properly digest the fat, resulting in 10-15% of the energy we just ate being excreted out (into the loo) [3,4]. And of the fat that is digested, the process of oxidising (breaking down) these unsaturated fats is associated with a 10% boost to our metabolism- once again, that’s more energy *out* [5,6].

Starting to see how this nutty jigsaw piece fits into the kilo curbing puzzle? Ironically, it’s not entirely about the

fat.

It wouldn’t be fair if I didn’t give a quick mention to two of the super nutrients in nuts that often seem to play second fiddle to the fat when in the public eye. Nuts are packed full of **protein** (containing almost all essential amino acids) and **fibre**, both well-known to help satisfy hunger and *reduce* our appetite [7,8]. This can lead to less snacking later in the day, helping to minimise overall daily energy intake.

Oh, and can you guess what other nutrient in nuts makes us feel full? Yep, the fat in nuts releases hormones that curb hunger too [9,10,11,12]!.

As you can see, the beneficial role nut consumption can play in curbing the kilos has long been smothered and jaded by the term “fattening”. But now that science has begun to uncover the fat-fighting metabolic secrets of nuts, perhaps we will no longer be so liberal with the F-word.

So if you are not already having a handful or two each day, now is the perfect time to go nuts!

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