

The New York Times

Well

Tara Parker-Pope on Health

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DECEMBER 10, 2008, 3:45 PM

## Going Nuts for the Holidays

Nuts are high in calories, but they may not be as fattening as once thought. (Joyce Dopkeen/The New York Times)

Nuts are a big part of many holiday celebrations, whether it's pecan pie, chestnut stuffing or just a handful of cashews grabbed at the office party.

Healthy Holidays [30 Days of Holiday Eating](#)

A series of daily tips, tidbits and insights about holiday food.

[When Picky Eaters Grow Up](#)

[Holiday Feasting on a Budget](#)

While numerous studies have linked nut consumption to better heart health, most nuts are loaded with calories — from about 160 to 200 calories per ounce. For years, I have avoided nuts despite the health benefits, because I was worried about gaining weight.

But a recent report in the Berkeley Wellness Letter spreads some good cheer about nuts. The Wellness Letter notes that despite the calories and fat found in nuts, eating them regularly may actually help with weight control. Here's an excerpt:

People who eat nuts regularly tend to weigh less than those who don't — or at least they don't weigh more, population studies show. For instance, a Spanish study of nearly 9,000 people, reported in *Obesity* last year, found that those who ate nuts at least twice a week were less likely to gain weight over 28 months than those who never or rarely ate nuts.

Even when people add nuts to their usual diets, they don't seem to gain much, if any, weight. In a small study from Purdue University last year, women who added 344 calories worth of almonds a day to their diets — without purposefully cutting back on calories elsewhere or exercising more — did not gain weight after 10 weeks. Similar findings have been reported with walnuts and peanuts. Fewer studies have looked at whether nuts can actually help you lose weight, but one found that a low-calorie diet that included almonds led to more weight loss than a same-calorie, nut-free diet.

A 2007 review from Australia sums it up: When added freely to a diet, nuts cause less weight gain than would be predicted — and when added to a calorie-controlled diet, they don't cause weight gain and may sometimes make weight loss easier.

The Wellness Letter notes that the fiber and protein in nuts make you feel full longer and likely lead to eating less later. Some studies have suggested nuts may slightly increase your body's ability to burn calories, and as much as 17 percent of the fat in nuts passes out of the body undigested.

For more on the health benefits of nuts, read "[Why Go Nuts](#)" from the May Berkeley Wellness Letter.

And for a truly delicious holiday nut snack, check out this spiced pecan and cranberry recipe from *Cooking Light* magazine. My colleague brought this dish to the office other day and everyone went back for more.

### *Orange Chipotle-Spiced Pecan Mix*

*Ingredients:*

*1 tablespoon grated orange rind*  
*1 tablespoon fresh orange juice*  
*1 large egg white*  
*2 cups pecan halves*  
*1 tablespoon dark brown sugar*  
*1 teaspoon kosher salt*  
*1/2 teaspoon ground chipotle chile pepper*  
*Cooking spray*  
*1/2 cup sweetened dried cranberries*

Preparation:

1. Preheat oven to 225 degrees.
2. Combine first three ingredients in a medium bowl; stir with a whisk. Stir in pecans. Combine sugar, salt and pepper. Add to pecan mixture; toss well. Spread mixture in a single layer on a jelly-roll pan coated with cooking spray. Bake at 225 degrees for one hour, stirring occasionally. Remove from oven; cool completely. Stir in cranberries.

The magazine says the dish can be stored in an airtight container for up to one week, but I guarantee it won't last that long.