

News Updates on Almonds

September 2007

Lynn Mayer, MA, CNC

I teach my clients that calories do not necessarily count, that there are superior calories and poor choice calories and that your body will respond differently to each group.

The much admired, while vilified, Dr. Atkins demonstrated this in one of his studies. He put a group of people on 2,000 calories per day of a more carbohydrate based diet. This group not only didn't lose weight, in some cases they gained it. He then put the very same group of people on a 2,600 calorie diet that was more protein in nature. The group then lost weight.

Researchers have noted for some time that people who regularly eat almonds tend to weigh less than people who do not, even though they tend to eat more calories over the course of a day. A new study just out in the September issue of the British Journal of Nutrition sheds light on why almonds are able to provide valuable nutrition and help lower LDL cholesterol levels without contributing to weight gain.

In the study, women were instructed to eat 344 calories worth of almonds (slightly more than 2 ounces) every day for one 10-week period, and then eat their customary diet for another ten weeks. The women did not gain weight during the period they consumed almonds. In addition, because of the high vitamin E and magnesium content in almonds, they met the daily dietary recommendations for those two nutrients that most Americans don't consume in adequate amounts.

The researchers determined that the study participants felt satisfied, so they naturally compensated for most of the calories in almonds by replacing other foods in their normal daily diet with the almonds. They also noted a decrease in total carbohydrate intake, suggesting almonds may have replaced carbohydrate-rich foods.

Additionally, the researchers found that the fiber in almonds appears to block some of the fat they contain. So, in reality, almonds may provide fewer calories to the body than the amount the food label states. This raises broader questions about the availability of energy from foods, indicating that many may not actually deliver the amount listed on the nutrition facts label.

"Solid data has shown that eating one to three daily ounces of almonds can help lower LDL cholesterol levels," said study co-author Rick Mattes, Ph.D., R.D. from Purdue University in West Lafayette, IN. "But many health care providers have been hesitant to recommend almonds as a daily snack because they're a

relatively high-calorie food and could contribute to weight gain. This study challenges that assumption. The study indicates that the nutrition facts label may overstate the amount of energy available to the body from eating almonds.”

I rest my case. A calorie is not a calorie from the body’s perspective.

I have also taught my clients that raw foods provide health benefits that cooked foods do not. Raw foods contain active enzymes much needed by the body for digestion as well as all of life’s processes. Cooking destroys the activity of enzymes and denatures proteins which can result in toxic residues.

Very early nutritional studies demonstrated that a patient’s phagocyte and lymphocyte levels would rise after eating cooked food meals. That rise did not occur with those meals consisting of at least 50% raw food. It was concluded that a rise in phagocytes after a meal was due to the body cleaning up the residues from cooked food. As phagocytes are also needed to fight infection, if they are busy cleaning up from the diet, they are not available to fight infection. It is often said that today’s health dilemma is that we are suffering from ‘cooked food disease’.

To that end, raw nuts are your better choice. When they are roasted and toasted they have been stripped of their full benefit to the body.

In the past 5 years, however, the almond industry experienced two food safety incidents in which raw almonds were recalled due to the presence of Salmonella. While contamination in almonds is not common, the almond industry determined that aggressive measures were necessary to prevent any other occurrences.

As of September 1, 2007 the Almond Board of California and the USDA have created a mandatory program in which all raw almonds are to be sterilized. The most common method is fumigation with propylene oxide (PPO), a chemical banned in the European Union, Canada and Mexico as a possible carcinogenic to humans. Other methods of sterilization include steam heating, oil roasting and blanching. Although organic, raw almonds will not be fumigated, they will undergo the steam pasteurization and will therefore no longer be truly raw.

To educate yourself as to how this compromises the food source of almonds, puts almond growers especially the smaller family grower at a disadvantage and what you can do about it, please go to www.cornucopia.org/amond/AlmondFactSheet.doc.

Lynn Mayer is a Certified Nutrition Consultant and Health Coach here in Telluride, Colorado. Lynn is available for consultation in person, by phone 970 369-4790 or through her website www.thejoyofhealth.com.