

Pistachios

Pistachios, a beautiful green nut coated in purple and pink, originally grew in the deserts of Asia and the Middle East. Now grown in Australia, they still need hot summers and cold winters to bear fruit. **Pistachios** are botanically related to mangoes, peaches and nectarines. Just like fruit and vegetables, pistachios are packed with a wide range of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and phytochemicals beneficial to health. Enjoying a handful of nuts (30g) regularly as part of a healthy diet may reduce your risk of heart disease and type 2 diabetes and can help with weight management.¹⁻⁵ So eat two serves of fruit, five serves of veggies and a handful of nuts every day. A 30g serve of pistachios kernels is about 30 kernels. Have you had yours today?



Nutrition and health benefits of pistachios

Pistachios not only add great colour and texture to meals but are a worthwhile addition to your diet for these nutrition and health reasons too:

- **Rich source of healthy fats** – pistachios contain healthy unsaturated fats, predominantly monounsaturated fat (53% of total fat) with some polyunsaturated fat (31% of total fat), plus have a low proportion of saturated fat (11% of total fat).⁶

- **Contains natural plant sterols** – pistachios contain 214mg plant sterols per 100g. Around 2–3g of plant sterols each day may help to lower blood cholesterol levels by about 10% by reducing cholesterol re-absorption in the intestine.⁸
- **Source of plant protein particularly the amino acid arginine** – pistachios contain around 6g protein in a 30g handful.⁶ Arginine is an amino acid building block of protein which is converted to nitric oxide in the body. Nitric oxide causes blood vessels to relax and remain elastic, and helps prevent blood clotting.⁷ Pistachios have also been shown to reduce blood vessel stiffness.²⁶
- **Improve blood cholesterol** – a number of studies have shown that eating pistachios (30–120g/day) can reduce total cholesterol and ‘bad’ LDL cholesterol while increasing ‘good’ HDL cholesterol.^{9–14} In one of these studies, the more pistachios eaten (two handfuls a day instead of one) resulted in significantly greater improvements in blood cholesterol.¹⁰
- **Reduces oxidative stress** – oxidation causes damage to the cells in our body and is believed to be an important factor in the development of diseases such as heart disease, cataracts and macular degeneration, as well as playing a role in ageing. Researchers studying oxidative stress have found regular pistachio consumption can improve the body’s oxidative status.^{11, 13, 14}
- **Contains resveratrol** – this antioxidant is more commonly found in red wine but pistachios are one of the few nut sources of resveratrol with 115 micrograms per 100g.¹⁵ This concentration is similar to some lighter red wines.¹⁶ Resveratrol

appears to have anti-aging, anticancer, antiviral and cardioprotective properties.¹⁷ Pistachios also have a high antioxidant capacity higher than known superfoods such as blueberries and broccoli.¹⁸

A combination of the healthy fats, antioxidant vitamins and minerals, resveratrol, fibre, plant sterols and arginine content of pistachios, plus their cholesterol reducing and antioxidant effects, may explain how they promote heart health.

Pistachios also ...

- **Are a source of dietary fibre** – which is important for a healthy laxation and digestive system while making you feel fuller for longer.^{6, 19} A handful of pistachios provides around 10% of the recommended dietary intake of fibre for adults.⁶
- **Help with weight management** – although high in fat, research has found that eating pistachios (and other nuts) does not lead to weight gain as expected and in fact can help with weight management. A number of studies have

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Nutrient content of natural pistachio kernels⁶

Nutrient	Per 100g
Energy (kJ)	2389
Protein (g)	19.7
Fat, total (g)	50.6
Fat, saturated (g)	5.8
Fat, monounsaturated (g)	26.7
Fat, polyunsaturated (g)	15.8
Carbohydrate, total (g)	6.8
Carbohydrate, sugars (g)	5.9
Dietary fibre (g)	9.0
Sodium (mg)	7.0
Potassium (mg)	950
Iron (mg)	3.9
Zinc (mg)	2.3
Vitamin B6 (mg)	1.5
Vitamin A (ug RE)	22.0
Vitamin E (mg)	4.1
Plant Sterols (mg)	214
Arginine (g)	2.0
Resveratrol (ug) ¹⁵	115
Lutein and Zeaxanthin (ug) ²³	1405
Total polyphenols (mg GAE) ¹⁸	1657

For further information on the nutritional benefits of nuts and recipes visit

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found that regular nut eaters tend to have a lower body mass index (BMI) than those that don't eat nuts.¹⁻⁴ A study found 42g of pistachios daily over 12 weeks did not lead to weight gain.²⁰

- **Are a rich source of vitamin B6** – and contain other B vitamins which are important for nerve function and energy production. A handful of pistachios provides more than one-third of your daily needs of vitamin B6.^{6, 19}
- **Are a source of plant iron and zinc** – which along with their protein content, make them a great choice for vegetarians.^{6, 19} Pistachios contain 1.2mg iron, 0.7mg zinc and 6g protein in a 30g serve. To boost the absorption of plant iron, eat pistachios with vitamin C rich foods and beverages such as stir fried veggies or citrus juices.
- **Help control blood glucose** – studies have found eating pistachios with carbohydrate foods help reduce blood glucose levels following the meal.^{20, 21} Research also shows 57g pistachios per day reduces glucose and insulin levels in prediabetes.²⁷
- **Protect against eye disease** – pistachios contain significant amounts of the antioxidants lutein and zeaxanthin.²³ These antioxidants have been shown to reduce the risk of age-related macular degeneration (AMD).²⁴ The Blue Mountains Eye Study, a large study of elderly Australians, found that eating one or two servings of nuts each week reduced the risk of early AMD by over 30%.²⁵

Buying and storage tips

When choosing pistachio kernels, look for crisp, plump kernels. If in shell look for split, clean, creamy white coloured shells with the kernel bursting to get out. To keep nuts in the best condition, store them in an airtight container in the refrigerator or freezer. Nuts can be refrigerated for up to 4 months and frozen for up to 6 months. Return nuts to room temperature before eating to bring back their nutty taste profile.

6 ways to include pistachios in your diet

- Pistachio pesto – combine pistachio nuts, basil, garlic, olive oil and parmesan and use for a topping on meat or fish, or to serve with pasta.
- Pistachios can be used to add extra flavor and nutrition to biscotti or shortbread.
- Spiced couscous – cook couscous with stock, cinnamon, cardamom and cloves and toss through a handful each of currants and pistachios.
- Pistachios in their shells make a great pre-dinner snack, and having to shell them helps to prevent overeating.²²
- Toss a handful of pistachios through rice salads or pilafs.
- Cut a slice or two of wholegrain bread into small cubes and combine with your favourite fresh herbs, an egg and roughly chopped pistachios for a tasty stuffing for meat or chicken.

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