A handful of nuts a day could slash risk of heart disease and cancer

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Ahandful of nuts a day could significantly cut the risk of heart disease, cancer and early death, major research suggests.

The study by Imperial College London shows that those consuming at least 20g of nuts daily had far lower risks from major diseases.

Eating such an amount - the equivalent of a handful a day - cut the chance of heart disease by nearly 30 per cent, the risk of cancer by 15 per cent, and that of premature death by 22 per cent.

It was also associated with a 40 per cent drop in diabetes risk  and a halving in the chance of death from a respiratory disease.

Those in the study were eating a range of nuts, including walnuts, almonds, hazelnuts, cashews, pistachios, pecans, Brazil nuts and peanuts.

All types of nuts protected against heart disease and reduced the risk of early mortality.

Peanuts were found to cut the risk of stroke, while tree nuts were associated with the [reduced risk of cancer.](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/food-and-drink/news/nuts-could-reduce-risk-of-prostate-cancer-death-by-a-third/)

Researchers said the benefits appeared to come from the nutritional value of nuts.

Study co-author Dagfinn Aune, from Imperial College London, said: "Nuts and peanuts are high in fibre, magnesium, and polyunsaturated fats - nutrients that are beneficial for cutting cardiovascular disease risk and which can reduce cholesterol levels.

"Some nuts, particularly walnuts and pecan nuts are also high in antioxidants, which can fight oxidative stress and possibly reduce cancer risk.”

Although [nuts are high in fat](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/food-and-drink/features/should-you-really-eat-fat-to-stay-slim-the-new-food-rules-explai/), there was also evidence they could reduce the risk of obesity, he suggested.

Dr Aune said that just a handful of nuts seemed to have a “substantial effect” with results found consistently across a number of diseases.

The team, whose findings appear in the journal BMC Medicine, analysed data from 29 studies including more than 800,000 participants.

While there was some variation between the populations that were studied, such as between men and women, people living in different regions, or people with different risk factors, the researchers found that nut consumption was associated with a reduction in disease risk across most of them.

No added benefit was found from eating more than 20g or 0.7 oz of nuts daily.

Earlier this year a separate study by Imperial College London suggested that [feeding babies peanuts early could prevent allergy.](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/2016/09/20/feeding-babies-peanuts-early-may-prevent-future-allergy-study-fi/)