

[The Peanut Butter Puzzle](#)

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Including nuts and peanuts as part of a healthy diet can help to reduce the risk of heart disease. Studies have shown they have heart-protective nutrients. These include:

- Unsaturated fats
- Potassium
- Calcium
- Magnesium
- Tocopherols (part of the vitamin E family)
- Phytochemicals (special chemicals in plant foods that may help fight diseases)

Nuts and peanuts are good sources of monounsaturated fats. These are healthy fats. They help to lower LDL (“bad”) cholesterol. Polyunsaturated fats, found in vegetable and fish oils, are also healthy fats. Research on the Mediterranean diet has shown the heart-healthy effects of choosing these healthy fats over the unhealthy saturated fats. These are found mostly in animal and dairy foods.

You can enjoy nuts and peanuts right from their shells, or in the form of nut and peanut butters.

What Should I Look for in a Peanut or Nut Butter?

Added ingredients in peanut and nut butters can quickly overshadow their health benefits. Most peanut butters and nut butters will have a similar number of calories per serving. To help you choose the best option, here are some helpful tips:

- Check the ingredients label for “partially hydrogenated” vegetable oils. These oils are a source of trans fats. These fats raise your LDL (“bad”) cholesterol and lower your HDL (“good”) cholesterol.
- Pay attention to the sodium content. Most of the sodium in our diets comes from prepared foods. Look for peanut butters labeled “unsalted” or “no salt added.”
- “Reduced fat” does not mean reduced calorie. Some of the healthy fats found in peanuts and nuts are lost when they're made into butters. Hydrogenated vegetable oils may still be added to get the right texture, along with more sugar.
- Go for a peanut butter labeled “natural.” Natural peanut butters are often made of ground peanuts and salt. They don't have added hydrogenated oils. Sometimes palm oil is added for texture. Palm oil, also called palm fruit oil, is not the same as palm kernel oil, which is higher in saturated fat.

How Do Chocolate Nut Spreads Stack Up?

Chocolate nut spreads, such as Nutella, should not be confused for nut butters. The first ingredient in these spreads is often sugar. This makes these spreads higher in sugar and lower in protein than peanut and nut butters. A better option is a chocolate nut spread that has nuts as the first ingredient, such as Justin's Nut Butters.

What Are Some Alternatives to Peanut Butter?

Grocery stores are beginning to carry different kinds of nut butters. Almond and cashew butters are great alternatives to traditional peanut butter. Also, some of these nut butters are naturally lower in saturated fat than peanut butter (see the table below).

Nut-free alternatives are also becoming more available in stores. Soy nut butter and sunflower seed butters are good protein sources that are also rich in monounsaturated fats. This makes them great nut-free alternatives to peanut butter. Soy nut butter is made from roasted soybeans. And similar to peanuts and nuts, they are a good source of protein and healthy fats.

Storage Tips

Store peanut and nut butter jars upside down in the refrigerator. This will prevent the natural oils from separating. If you see a layer of oil at the top when you open the jar, simply mix it back in.

Nut Butter Nutrition Facts

You can compare the nutrition information for 2 tablespoons of different nut butters.

* Free of peanuts or tree nuts

Source: U.S.D.A. Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 24

More Than a Snack

Peanut butter makes a great snack. But peanut and nut butters can be part of a meal, too. For example:

- Spread them on apple or banana slices.
- Substitute them for butter or margarine on whole grain toast, whole wheat English muffins and other types of bread.
- Add them to vegetable stir-frys.
- Use them to thicken soups and stews.
- Blend them into a smoothie.
- Mix them into salad dressing.
- Warm them up and use as a topping for ice cream and frozen yogurt.

See Also

[10 Osteoporosis Myths](#), [10 Ways To Make Your Recipes Healthier](#), [A Disease-Prevention Diet for Men](#), [A New Diet To Manage Irritable Bowel Syndrome](#), [A Scorecard on Supplements](#), [Abdominal Obesity and Your Health](#), [Acne And The Role Of Diet](#), [Airports - Avoid the High-Fat Food Trap](#), [Alkaline Diets and Cancer: Fact or Fiction](#), [All About Breastfeeding](#), [Allergies: When Nuts Are Not Healthy](#), [Anemia, Fatigue and Iron Deficiency: Facts and Myth](#), [Are Beans the Magical Food?](#), [Are Energy Drinks Safe?](#), [Are](#)

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