# NUTS FOR WEIGHT AND FITNESS GOALS

Whether you are a recreational athlete, a weekend warrior, social player or an ultra-endurance athlete, your body needs adequate fuel to perform at its best. And it's also crucial to consider the long-term health effects of the foods you consume.

### Nuts and weight

Nuts sometimes get a bad rap when it comes to body weight, due to their high fat and energy content. But the body of evidence tells us that regular consumption of nuts is not only integral to health, but also assists with weight management - with regular nut intake linked with reduced body weight, lower BMI and lower waist circumference. (i ii iii iv)

Nuts specifically assist with weight management and body composition goals by:

- Satisfying hunger and reducing appetite, due to their healthy unsaturated fat content (omega-3 and omega-6), dietary fibre and plant protein content (v)
- Releasing satiety hormones after consumption, to keep us fuller for longer
- Trapping some of the naturally-occurring fats in their fibrous walls meaning our bodies don't absorb or digest up to 30% of the energy from some nut varieties (vi)
- Slowing digestion when eaten with carbohydrate-rich foods (vii) helping to reduce insulin levels and giving us sustained energy for longer. (viii)



#### Nuts support active people, everyday

Nuts contain a range of nutrients important for daily health. Many of these same nutrients also enhance sporting performance and recovery, including:

- Vitamin E, vitamin B6, niacin, folate, magnesium, zinc, non-haem iron, calcium, copper, selenium, phosphorus and potassium (ix x)
- Phytochemicals and omega-3 fats that act as anti-inflammatories that help:
  - Boost the body's function, immunity and recovery from exercise (xi)
  - Relieve joint pain
  - Promote muscle damage recovery from exercise
  - Protect heart health
  - Boost mood and cognition, helping with skill and decision making (xii xiii)

Despite this, 98% of Australians are not meeting the recommended serve of 30g of nuts daily. The average intake is just 4.6g/day, so many people need to increase their consumption six-fold to meet the recommendations essential for good health. (xvi)

#### How to eat nuts before exercise:

Most people can tolerate a meal 2-4 hours before exercise and/or a small snack 1-2 hours before exercise, without experiencing any unwanted stomach distress. Depending on the intensity of the exercise and you, as an individual, it may be better to avoid nuts too close to exercise, as they are slow to digest.

If exercise intensity is LOW and you have 2-4 HOURS to digest:

 A handful (30g) of nuts in the main meal 2-4 hours before exercise should be tolerable.
 For example, sprinkle nuts on oats/cereal or in muesli, use nut butter on bread, wraps, crumpets or crackers, or blend nuts into a smoothie.

If exercise intensity is HIGH and/or you have LIMITED TIME (<2 hours) to digest:

• It's best to avoid nuts before and during exercise. Instead, eat nuts as part of your recovery meal/snacks and on rest days.





#### How to eat nuts during exercise:

At rest and the onset of low-to-moderate-intensity exercise (25% up to 65% of VO<sup>2</sup> max - for example, exercise where you can still hold a conversation, such as walking, housework, stretching, yoga or riding at an easy pace), fat can provide a major portion of the energy requirements for skeletal muscle.

Nuts are a portable, healthy snack during exercise and for an energy boost on the go:

- Prepare a nut mix for during a hike, bike ride or a day at the beach
- Snack on a handful of nuts during a weight session, or while doing housework or gardening
- Keep a container of nuts in your car, bag or drawer for an energy boost before, during or after work
- Include nuts in after-school 'top-ups' for hungry kids to tide them (or you!) over until dinner
- Choose a handful of nuts instead of relying on large amounts of highly-processed snacks especially if you (or your very active, growing children) have high energy demands.

## How nuts help with exercise recovery:

To help recover from exercise, protein is essential. This is due to its role in tissue and muscle repair and growth, and maintenance of muscle mass and normal bones.

#### As a guide, aim for:

20-30g of protein within one hour of hard or long-duration exercise, and 20-30g hits of protein at each meal over the day. A 30g handful of nuts provides 4-5g of protein, so nuts are a great addition to a recovery meal or snack - remember to also include other protein-rich foods over the day to maximise protein quality.
Carbohydrate to restore muscle glycogen stores used in exercise. Nuts are low in carbohydrates, but they pair well with nutritious carb-rich foods! For example, a wholegrain bread and nut butter sandwich, or a fruit and nut smoothie.
Vitamins and minerals to help replace nutrients lost in sweat. Among a whole host of nutrients, nuts contain iron, magnesium and calcium, which are important 'recovery nutrients'.



Examples of recovery snacks that include nuts:

- A glass of milk and a handful (30g) of nuts
- A cheese sandwich and a handful of nuts
- 170-200g high-protein yoghurt topped with a handful of nuts
- A bowl of muesli, where nuts are a key ingredient
- Toast topped with banana and 1½ tablespoons nut butter, plus a glass of milk
- Tofu stir-fry with noodles, made with satay sauce or topped with a handful of crushed nuts.

Try this recipe for a power-packed recovery smoothie (mix and match the ingredients):

- 30g nuts
- 375mL milk of choice (opt for a milk with >6g protein and 200mg calcium per 250mL)
- 1 ripe banana, peeled (can swap for alternative fruit)
- 1 teaspoon honey
- Place all ingredients in a blender and blend until smooth

So why not crunch on a handful of nuts next time you finish a workout and reap the health benefits of this nutrient-rich powerhouse snack? Your muscles, heart, brain and bones will be thanking you for it!



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