

Nutrition News You Can Use - Peanuts Pack a Big Potassium Punch for Better Health

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More and more consumers seem to be getting the message to cut down on salt (sodium) consumption by eating less highly processed products and not adding so much salt when cooking or at the table. But there's another side to the "eat less salt" message that needs to be heard just as loudly: "eat more potassium". It's easy to do this, once you know what good choices are available. And that's where peanuts come in, on their own as snacks, as peanut butter and as ingredients to combine with other potassium foods like vegetables, fruit or pulses - for a big potassium punch for better health.

The British Medical Journal recently featured three papers showing the health benefits of making "less salt, more potassium" dietary changes. This led to significant falls in blood pressure in people with both raised and normal blood pressure, irrespective of sex or ethnicity. The benefit was reduced strokes, heart attacks, and heart failure across populations. The review of studies on potassium in particular looked at controlled trials and studies covering over 128,000 healthy individuals.(1) While food processing has tended to increase the sodium content of foods, it has tended to reduce their potassium levels. So getting daily average intakes of potassium back up to towards 4g per day for adults, the researchers concluded, could reduce blood pressure in adults (with corresponding heart, circulatory and kidney benefits) and lower their stroke risk by about 25%. That's important because it is estimated that most US adults only consume half as much potassium as they need and if their sodium (salt) intakes are also higher than recommended (no more than about 1 teaspoon a day from all courses), the negative health impact of this imbalance is that much greater.

The researchers concluded, "these results suggest that increased potassium intake is potentially beneficial to most people without impaired renal handling of potassium for the prevention and control of elevated blood pressure and stroke." What does this have to do with peanuts? Potentially a great deal, once you realise that peanuts are not only good potassium sources, but that their potassium comes in a high protein and healthy fats and fibre package. That means, for instance, that a peanut butter protein rich breakfast - spread on whole grain toast with sliced banana - keeps you satisfied longer and is a big potassium hit to start the day with. The kids' classic snack "ants on a log" - peanut butter filled celery sticks dotted with raisins - is a triple potassium hit. And the flavour and texture variations are huge for tossing peanuts into salads or combining them with other vegetables, lean meat, fish, and low fat dairy products.

The good news is that changing both sodium and potassium levels in the recommended directions has a bigger impact on health than just changing one in isolation. That does not mean you have to give up salted snack peanuts either. Not only are they good potassium sources with about 190mg of potassium per 1 oz (28g) serving, but their sodium levels are not as high as many people believe. The American Heart Association confirmed that recently by awarding snack peanuts their "heart check" because their salt levels are well within the 140mg sodium/per ounce limit. Snack nuts are not a significant contributor to salt intake in the average American or European diet and they can certainly help with upping potassium intake. Of course, inshell peanuts and plain baked peanut kernels are naturally very low in sodium while having all the benefits of a substantial amounts of potassium per serving. The same is true of peanut butter, both smooth and crunchy.



What this means for consumers is that they can have potassium packed peanuts anytime: breakfast, snacks, lunch or an anytime meal at home or on the go. With all these possibilities, there is really no excuse not to get enough potassium in varied and flavoursome ways where peanut products can certainly play a part.

1. Aburto NJ et al. "Effect of increased potassium intake on cardiovascular risk factors and disease: systematic review and metaanalyses". *British Medical Journal* 5 April 2013; 346:f1378 doi: 10.1136/bmj.f1378 (free to download)



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