The Peanut: Food For Thought

The common peanut (or groundnut) offers more nutrition than was previously thought.

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by Neetu Gupta* and G.K.Kochar**

Since inception of this world, humans are working hard on what to eat and what not to eat. In present day, innumerable research work is being conducting through out the world to demonstrate the importance of nutritious & adequate diet to health. In present era instead of excluding bad food from the diet, more emphasis is being given to introduce and include beneficial foods in the diet to improve overall health of the individual and nation as a whole. The new thinking is helpful in combining optimal diet with other positive lifestyle factors to prevent chronic diseases including cardiovascular disease & diabetes.

Traditionally, peanuts were viewed as nutritionally useful, but gradually fell from this favour due to their high fat content. However, recent epidemiological and clinical studies have confirmed that consuming nuts at least five times per week may contribute to protect against cardiovascular disease , type two diabetes as peanuts are rich in the types of fat that actually reduce cardiovascular disease risk and have strong satiety properties . Irrespective of the amount of fat and nuts in the diet, cholesterol lowering diets that included nuts can reduced total cholesterol by approximate 4-16 per cent and low density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol by approximate 9-20 per cent as compared to a 3-14 per cent reduction in total cholesterol achieved with the American step-1 diet in normocholesterolemic adults . The major epidemiological studies concluded that consumption of 1 oz/30 g of nuts

more than once per week significantly reduced the relative risk of coronary heart disease in men and women .

Being a plant food, groundnut contains no cholesterol and has less than 20 per cent saturated fatty acid hence heart friendly. The key bioactive molecules present in peanuts that elicit cardioprotective effects are phytosterols or phytochemicals. Phytosterols are natural chemicals found in plants and are especially found in high concentrations in some plant oils and their seeds and legumes such as peanuts. The concentrations of these components are found in lower in fruits and vegetables. Phytosterols are considered equivalent to animal cholesterol in the human body, but their action in human body is very different. Contrary to increasing the cholesterol concentration in human body, they lower the body cholesterol level in two ways i.e., Firstly plant sterols block the absorption of dietary cholesterols that is circulating in the blood by competing and Secondly, they reduce the reabsorption of that cholesterol which our body naturally produces from the liver. So whether the cholesterols are high because of dietary habits or genetically or because of both reasons, eating food with phytosterols can help to lower blood cholesterol level.

Peanut and peanut products are unique whole foods that naturally contain photochemical. In addition to photochemical, some other hearts friendly following constituents are also present in these nuts: - · The photochemical (beta sitosterol & resveraterol) has been associated with reduced cardiovascular diseases and reduced cancer risks. · Peanuts also contain healthy unsaturated fat that may replace even a small amount of saturated fat in the diet with monounsaturated fat and thereby result in a big effect on health.

· Linoleic acid, which is immuno- modulator and anti cholesterol which is present up to 30 per cent in peanuts. · Groundnut is very good source of tocopherol i.e. vitamin E, and epidemiological studies proved inverse association between fatal stroke and tocopherol intake.

· Level of L-arginine (precursor of NO) are higher in peanuts than other nuts, NO is antithrombotic as it persuade vasodilation, inhibit platelet adhesion, activation and aggregation.

They also provide good amount of fiber compared to other foods.

· Have relatively high amounts of folic acid, thiamine, niacin, copper, manganese, phosphorous, magnesium and zinc.

· This over to above low content of sodium and high content of potassium, calcium and magnesium, a combination that further collectively is helpful for reducing the risk of cardiovascular diseases.

The contribution of each of these nutrients in protecting our health is significant. It is now well acknowledged that along with modifying the fat component of the diet, other dietary constituents can award additional protection from coronary heart diseases.

Peanuts also have a potential role in diabetes, it has the lowest glycemic index (GI) a measure of the rate at which carbohydrate from a particular food break down and release glucose in blood stream. It having lowest GI (14) among all other fruits (22-72), grains (22-87), beans (18-43) and most of the vegetables (30-53) are preferred for a person with diabetes.

Some suggestion to add peanut into daily diet

Try new dishes with peanuts, beans or seeds instead of cheese and meat or spread peanut butter instead of cream cheese or butter.

Product	Idea
Peanut oil	sauté vegetables
Peanut	grab a small handful
Peanut butter	just for 2 tbsp.-perfect for a sandwich
Peanut flour	substitute for half the white flour in bread or cookies recipes

* Doctoral candidate

** Professor, Foods and Nutrition cum Chairperson, Department of Home Science, Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra